

# **Bonds Away: Baseball Mythology and the 2007 Home Run Chase**

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Interdisciplinary MA Program in Popular Culture

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of

Masters of Arts in Popular Culture

Brock University  
St. Catharines, Ontario

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## Abstract

*In 2007, Barry Bonds hit his 756<sup>th</sup> home run, breaking Hank Aaron's all-time record for most home runs in a Major League career. While it would be expected that such an accomplishment would induce unending praise and adulation for the new record-holder, Bonds did not receive the treatment typically reserved for a beloved baseball hero. The purpose of this thesis is to assess media representations of the 2007 home run chase in order to shed light upon the factors which led to the mixed representations which accompanied Bonds' assault on Aaron's record. Drawing from Roland Barthes' concept of myth, this thesis proposes that Bonds was portrayed in predominantly negative ways because he was seen as failing to embody the values of baseball's mythology.*

*Using a qualitative content analysis of three major American newspapers, this thesis examines portrayals of Bonds and how he was shown both to represent and oppose elements from baseball's mythology, such as youth, and a distant, agrarian past. Recognizing the ways in which baseball is associated with American life, the media representations of Bonds are also evaluated to discern whether he was portrayed as personifying a distinctly American set of values.*

*The results indicate that, in media coverage of the 2007 home run chase, Bonds was depicted as a player of many contradictions. Most commonly, Bonds' athletic ability and career achievements were contrasted with unflattering descriptions of his character, including discussions of his alleged use of performance-enhancing substances. However, some coverage portrayed Bonds as embodying baseball myth. The findings contribute to an appreciation of the importance of historical context in examining media representations. This understanding is enhanced by an analysis of a selection of articles on Mark McGwire's record-breaking season in 1998, and careful consideration of, and comparison to, the context under which Bonds performed in 2007. Findings are also shown to support the contemporary existence of a strong American baseball mythology. That Bonds is both condemned for failing to uphold the mythology and praised for personifying it suggests that the values seen as inherent to baseball continue to act as an American cultural benchmark.*

## **Acknowledgements**

Recognizing the subject of this thesis, it seems appropriate to acknowledge that this project was, from beginning to end, a team effort. This thesis would not have been completed without the contributions and continuous support of several individuals that, like members of all good teams, provided a range of diverse skills and abilities.

I would like to express my deepest gratitude to the members of my thesis committee, Nick Baxter-Moore, Scott Henderson, Jim Leach and Mark Dyreson for their generosity with both their time and knowledge in helping me carry out this project. Special thanks to Dr. Baxter-Moore, whose insight, patience and good humour rivalled that of a seasoned Major League manager. I would also like to thank the faculty from the Department of Communications, Popular Culture and Film - specifically Greg Gillespie, Michael Ripmeester and Dale Bradley, whose willingness to supply advice and perspective was always appreciated.

I was especially fortunate to have the camaraderie of Armando Alfaro throughout a long summer of being confined to the graduate student office. I am similarly indebted to Amanda Bishop, who had answers to my logistical questions and was always a friendly face down the hall. I would also like to extend much thanks to my family and friends for their encouragement, understanding and endless supply of laughter throughout this process. Finally, thank you to Katie, who always believed in me and now probably knows more about Barry Bonds than she ever thought possible.

## **Chapter One**

### **There's Something About Barry**

On August 8<sup>th</sup>, 2007, Barry Bonds hit his seven-hundred and fifty-sixth career home run, breaking the Major League record previously held by Hank Aaron. While it might usually be expected that such an historic moment in baseball history would be accompanied by a flood of praise and adulation for the new record holder, this did not occur in the summer of 2007.

The momentous home run was not treated as a coronation of the latest baseball hero to become legend. The Commissioner of Major League Baseball, Bud Selig, was not present to witness the record-breaking feat (Curry, August 8, 2007). Neither was Hank Aaron there to congratulate his successor (Schulman, August 8, 2007). The news of Bonds' achievement was greeted with mixed reactions as it flashed across scoreboards at stadiums in other Major League cities (Associated Press, August 7, 2007). The responses of the sports media were equally mixed.

It is worthwhile to examine why the player who holds both of baseball's most prestigious records – most home runs in a single season and most career home runs - is not held in the same high regard as similarly or less talented players of the past. In other words, why is the task of glorifying Barry Bonds so difficult to undertake? Only nine

years earlier, the media coverage of Mark McGwire's breaking of the single season home run record possessed a vastly different tone to that of Bonds' most recent home run chase. The following thesis will address how media coverage accorded to Barry Bonds differs from that given to past record-breakers such as McGwire and Aaron and what characteristics are perceived to separate Bonds from other valorized players of years past. The analysis will evaluate how these differing characteristics are portrayed and how, despite his athletic and statistical achievements, the meanings associated with Bonds make his place in baseball history a contested one.

Allegations of steroid use, disagreeable character and a chequered past contribute to an overall portrayal of Barry Bonds that exists at odds with traditional baseball mythology. Media representations of Bonds counteract the meanings, symbols and connotations that have been associated with baseball since its inception as a major American sport. To comprehend how a player can be constructed as an antithesis to a sport's mythology, it is crucial to unearth its origins and current manifestations.

Using Roland Barthes' concept of myth as outlined in his 1957 book *Mythologies*, it can be seen how the meanings associated with baseball in the United States exist on two levels. The first level, known in Barthesian terms as the level of *language*, concerns itself with the systematic composition of a text (Barthes, 115). The signifiers uphold a primary and direct relationship with the signifieds; for instance, if one is handed an image of a baseball game being played, one can read that baseball is a sport played outdoors on a diamond with nine players a side. There is a formal correlation that exists between the signifier (an image of a baseball game) and the signified (baseball is a sport played

outdoors on a diamond with nine players a side) that creates a sign, or what Barthes identifies as the *meaning* of the image (117).

From this initial *meaning* (also known as denotation) stems a second level of representation (connotation) that is derivative from the first and thus possesses a metalinguistic property (Barthes, 115). This is the level of *myth*, where the *meaning* of the first order becomes its own signifier, representative of one or more new signifieds. Barthes labels the sign of the second order *signification*. This *signification* imposes on the reader a new understanding of the primary *meaning* (Barthes, 117). Thus, the same image of a baseball game can now, on the level of myth, act as a *signification* of traditional American values, for example. But what values does the game of baseball signify and why are these values viewed as distinctly American? To understand how baseball became 'America's pastime,' it is necessary to trace the formulation of the sport's mythology beginning with the self-constructed beliefs of the game's origins.

In 1905, sports entrepreneur and former star pitcher Albert G. Spalding proposed a project to establish baseball's true beginnings. A committee consisting of several members of American high society produced testimonies purporting that baseball had been invented by Civil War hero Abner Doubleday. According to the largely anecdotal evidence provided by the committee, it had been Doubleday who, as a young boy, laid out the first baseball diamond in Cooperstown, New York in 1839 (Levine, 114). These findings were published shortly thereafter in a highly publicized book, written by Spalding himself, entitled *America's National Game* (1911). The book is rumoured to have sold over ninety thousand copies and, thus, what is referred to as the Doubleday

Myth became established as part of modern baseball consciousness (Block, xiv; Riess, 17).

Setting the sport's creation myth in a small, rural hamlet proves to be significant as to how baseball is perceived. Although professional baseball is typically played amid the urban sprawl of American (and Canadian) metropolises, the ballparks themselves stand as ties to a rural, agrarian past. The field is a contrast of lush grass and coarse dirt, with the lines drawn in impermanent chalk. Similarly, most baseball diamonds are unprotected from the elements and, therefore, like the cycle of agriculture, the playing of baseball is highly dependent on the season. Unlike indoor sports such as basketball and hockey, or cold weather sports such as football, baseball can only be played when the weather allows. Just as certain crops are grown in different areas of the world based on the particular season, the geography of baseball is also strongly influenced by climate (Mandelbaum, 42).

Although baseball may be dependent on the seasons, it is nevertheless independent of time. Baseball is a timeless game; its play is not governed by a clock (Riess, 18). The game does not conclude until the final out of the ninth inning has been recorded. Thus, the pace of a baseball contest stands impervious to the demands of time. There exists no concept of delay of the game and accordingly, significant lengths of time between pitches, batters and innings are institutionalized as part of the rules. The game does not stop to allow changes of position, discussion of strategy or exchanges of players; rather, these events are built into the timeless framework of baseball and occur not only at regular intervals, but also at the participants' discretion, with no penalty being assessed. The slow tempo and freedom from time stand in stark contrast to the frenetic pace of



urban life and hearken back to a simplistic agrarian existence free from man-made deadlines and unwavering schedules (Mandelbaum, 41).

The decision to proclaim Cooperstown as the 'Birthplace of Baseball' was not an inconsequential one. Spalding and his committee, officially known as the Mills Commission, not only settled on a rural origin, but a distinctly American one. Henry Chadwick, a prominent baseball journalist and English immigrant, had long claimed that baseball had developed from an English stick and ball game called rounders (Levine, 112-113). However, the Mills Commission was intent on discrediting Chadwick's explanation and replacing it with its own revised history of the game's invention (Block, 3). This commitment to debunking Chadwick's account went beyond merely imposing a new geographic origin for the game of baseball; it also involved promoting the commission's choice for the sport's inventor and seminal figure.

Suggesting that the sport was originally conceived by a young boy has fostered a lasting association between baseball and an idyllic American childhood. In addition to being portrayed as contributing to an ideal American upbringing, baseball is also seen as drawing from the innocence and purity of youth (Skolnik, 10). Baseball evokes a remembrance of childhood summers, where the adult-imposed routine of school is annually exchanged for an all encompassing freedom from responsibility. If, for this reason, summer is the season most fondly remembered from one's youth, then baseball would often exist as a predominant component of one's childhood memories. Thus, baseball induces nostalgia for one's personal past and facilitates an escape from the inevitable obligations of the adult world (Mandelbaum, 52).

The young Abner Doubleday grew up to become an upstanding military officer serving in the Civil War (Block, 33), and correspondingly, this celebrated aspect of the biographical history of its inventor stands as an integral component of baseball's creation myth. As Spalding wrote regarding Doubleday in a letter to Mills Commission members, "...it certainly appeals to an American's pride to have the great national game of Baseball created and named by a Major General in the United States Army." (Spalding, A.G. quoted in Levine, 114). The 'discovery' of a native origin in the United States, as well as casting a distinguished patriot as its inventor, would not only encourage fans to reminiscence about an agrarian past or an ideal childhood, but would also allow baseball to serve as the vehicle for a distinctly American set of values (Riess, 17).

Democratic principles such as equality and inclusiveness are regarded as inherent to the game of baseball (Cogliano, 147). These correlate to a set of individual values that exist as central to American character and can be found to favour a particular type of ballplayer. Baseball's rural and organic qualities produce the image of an archetypal player who is stoic, self-reliant and robust: the rugged individual. The literature surrounding the archetype and its potential variations will be discussed in further detail in subsequent chapters. The 'player-as-rugged individual' character type, besides possessing a longstanding association with baseball, has also come to be identified with America itself (Mandelbaum, 53). This idealized player is also perceived as possessing upstanding morals and is meant to be emulated by America's youth (Riess, 25). However, it should be noted that although, in years past, players exhibiting objectionable behaviour were nevertheless portrayed as virtuous individuals, Barry Bonds appears to be offered no such leniency.

My primary research will focus on coverage of the 2007 home run chase in three major American newspapers (*New York Times*, *San Francisco Chronicle*, and *USA Today*) sampled from a large portion of the 2007 season. Using qualitative content analysis, I intend to analyze the media discourse (or discourses) which construct the image of Barry Bonds. The constructs revealed in the media discourse(s) will then be compared to the archetypal construct of the idealized player as presented in baseball mythology, and examined in terms of the significant components of baseball myth.

This thesis will be divided into a series of chapters, each in turn focusing more specifically on Barry Bonds and his connections to baseball mythology. In chapter two, *Baseball Mythology and its Place in American Culture*, I will further explore Roland Barthes' conception of myth, and place particular emphasis on its semiological and ideological functions. This section of the chapter will also include a review of the antecedents to Barthesian myth and their relation to the major themes outlined in *Mythologies*. Barthes' discussion of the naturalization of myth will be outlined to illustrate the transformation of history into nature and the motivations inherent to mythic significations. If discourses presented in mass media function, at least in part, to reinforce and recreate existing social relations (Foucault, 1978), then the constructed image of a particular player or event can undergo significant modifications depending on its ability to strengthen (or weaken) the predominant baseball myths.

However, before these effects can be taken into account, it will be necessary to describe the characteristics and manifestations of baseball mythology. In chapter two, I will introduce competing accounts of the origin of baseball and their relation to the historical account propagated by A.G. Spalding and the Mills Commission. I will also

examine how remnants of the Doubleday Myth have persisted long after it was abandoned as a viable explanation of the game's beginnings. This discussion will culminate in an illustration of how, in many ways, Abner Doubleday acts as the centrepiece of the overarching baseball myth, and will link the Doubleday narrative to significant facets of the mythology, such as youth and an agrarian past.

Having outlined the relationship between baseball's mythology and the sport's alleged origins, I will then describe how the components of the myth are representative of distinctly American values, and illustrate how these ideals are seen as relating to more general facets of American life. While acknowledging its supposed status as a democratic and integrative sport, I will also include an examination of the ways in which baseball acts as a vehicle for a distinctly White Anglo-Saxon Protestant value system. This discussion will lead into an assessment of the social functions of the mythology and the potential motivations which are believed to underlie the promotion of these values within the sport. Furthermore, examples of the reproduction and dissemination of baseball mythology in contemporary literature, popular music and film will be cited. I will conclude chapter two by outlining the various counter-myths which can be seen as contradicting the overarching mythology and consider their effects on the dominant American perspective on baseball.

In chapter three, entitled Chasing Records, I will outline the methodology to be used in gathering and analysing research material. I will begin with a brief description of the means by which elements of multiple methodologies were combined within one analytic process and summarize each of these approaches. The summary will commence with a review of the relationships between Barthesian myth and semiotics, as well as the

limitations of semiotic analysis as a rigorous and systematic methodology. By referencing concepts provided by scholars such as Norman Fairclough (1989, 1995a, 1995b), I will also elucidate how elements of critical linguistics and critical discourse analysis were incorporated within my methodological approach. I will then describe how the properties and processes inherent to semiotics, critical linguistics and critical discourse analysis are, for the purposes of this thesis, most appropriately combined as part of a comprehensive qualitative content analysis.

Having discussed the strengths and limitations of content analysis as a qualitative method, I will then develop definitions for central concepts, such as frames and themes, including summaries of their theoretical underpinnings and relevance to the study of journalism. This discussion will lead into an outline of the techniques used in selecting the three newspapers which act as the principle sources, as well as the duration from which the sample material was drawn. Recognizing the need for the systematic recording of data, chapter three will also introduce the categories which were employed during the coding process. Several categories, such as ‘page number’ and ‘by line,’ were seen as conducive to the examination of explicit aspects of the sample; in contrast, categories such as ‘overall perception’ and ‘other comments’ were meant to allocate space to record ideas and concepts which were inferred from the sample material. These specifics will be discussed in preparation for chapter four, which is separated into two parts: Bonds’ official biography (chapter four A), and his unofficial biography through media representations (chapter four B).

In chapter four A, I will provide an account of Barry Bonds’ personal life and career as a professional baseball player. This biographical summary will continue at the

outset of chapter four B with further exploration into Bonds' personal history. This review will include a discussion of Bonds' dealings with the media, as well as a survey of the allegations surrounding Bonds' steroid use. Thereafter, the findings seen to emerge from the sample data will be reported in a series of sections. The first four sections will consist of a group of case studies in which coverage surrounding significant events in Bonds' season will be addressed in greater detail. These cases will be followed by an analysis of the instances in which Bonds is compared to other baseball players and notable public figures. The bulk of chapter four, however, will be the summary and analysis of themes, such as race and steroids, which were found to be prominent in the 2007 coverage of Bonds. Throughout chapter four, I will illustrate relevant findings with extensive quotation from significant examples.

In chapter five, A Giant of Mythological Proportions, I will first compare the newspaper coverage surrounding Bonds' 2007 home run chase with a smaller selection of reportage from Mark McGwire's record setting season in 1998. An analysis of the connotations associated with Bonds in 2007 and McGwire in 1998 will aid in illuminating the ways in which similar accomplishments can be portrayed differently based, in part, on the perceived character and public image of the participants involved. This particular comparison can be seen as holding greater value because each player faced similar accusations regarding the use of performance-enhancing substances over the course of their respective historic seasons. The McGwire articles will be analyzed using similar criteria to those which were employed in exploring the 2007 coverage, with particular attention being paid to the treatment of McGwire's use of a performance-enhancing substance. The juxtaposition of Bonds in 2007 and McGwire in 1998 will lead

into an inquiry as to the importance of historical context in evaluating the construction of media images. Bonds' historic 2001 season, in which he was seemingly more accepted by journalists and fans alike, will also be considered as part of this discussion.

I will then address the implications of my findings in more general terms.

Although this may be premature, it may be suggested that media representations of Barry Bonds and his record breaking achievements can be subject to at least two interpretations. First, the critical portrayals of athletes can be seen as reflecting a general shift in American culture where those in positions of power are now held more accountable for their actions. Where private transgression and illicit behaviour were once ignored and passed over by the media and public alike, politicians, business moguls, as well as baseball players, may now be expected to conform to the same rules of behaviour that govern everybody else. Secondly, the lack of positive coverage surrounding Barry Bonds may demonstrate the continuing power of the American baseball mythology. As players are increasingly endowed with celebrity status and their playing salaries continue to escalate, the instance of a bona fide superstar being denied access to the sport's mythological domain could stand as testament to the authority of the sport's original ideals. It could also signal a potential resistance to a growing culture of entitlement and egotism within baseball.

Recognizing these initial hypotheses, I will conclude chapter five by assessing Bonds' current placement within baseball mythology and his status in comparison to the persisting image of the sport's ideal player. The degree to which Bonds is granted access to the mythology will stand as a considerable indicator as to the overall presence of the myth as a facet of American life. Recent cultural changes, such as the instantaneous

access to information, will be considered in analyzing the contemporary relevance of the mythology, as well as the means by which it can be preserved. The media portrayals of Barry Bonds' historical achievements can provide a window into the American baseball consciousness and help illuminate whether the former Giants left-fielder represents a deviation from the sports' traditional values or a transition towards a new set of ideals.



## Chapter Two

### Baseball Mythology and its Place in American Culture

It is possible to define myth as a narrative which carries a level of social significance and is disseminated to allow a cultural group to engage in its meaning (Csapo, 9). The plot of such a narrative often revolves around the origin of natural things and the exposition of dramatic human events. The answers to questions of metaphysical (and often spiritual) importance are often provided by myths and result in the creation of a communal system of knowledge (Danesi & Perron, 254). Myth is a term derived from the ancient Greek 'mythos' meaning 'speech' or 'plot' (Danesi & Perron, 254; von Hendy, 1). In the post-Mycenean Age (after 1100 BC), the Greeks began developing an extensive tradition of storytelling. This tradition involved the great poets Homer and Hesiod, whose oral compositions were instrumental in allowing Greek myths to endure for centuries before they were transcribed (von Hendy, 1). The Greek oral tradition, and others like it, illustrate the power of myth to convey invaluable insight and knowledge that transcends the particular local and historical occasion of its telling (25).

The study of myth has often entailed the creation of an 'us versus them' dichotomy, which places myth as the cultural necessity of an ancient or non-Western other. In writing *Mythologies*, Roland Barthes removed myth from this context by stating

that it was widely pervasive in Western civilization and its effects were perceptible in seemingly mundane cultural activities (Csapo, 277). However, Barthes' re-contextualization of myth cannot be fully understood without first identifying the antecedents of *Mythologies* in the work of Northrop Frye, Claude Levi-Strauss and Louis Althusser. Elements from the discussions of myth undertaken by the aforementioned three theorists are central to Barthes' argument and situate myth as an enduring cultural and ideological form.

Northrop Frye first identified the structural consistency of myth in his review of Ernst Cassirer's 'An Essay on Man' (1944), but provided a more detailed account of this formulaic regularity in the four essays contained in *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957). Despite describing the symbolism and interrelatedness of specific mythological imagery in the third essay entitled 'Archetypical Criticism: A Theory of Myths,' it is in the second essay, 'Ethical Criticism: A Theory of Symbols,' where Frye provides his most insightful discussion regarding the structure of mythic forms (Russell, 71, 82). Writing in the context of literary criticism, Frye sees myth as existing in the 'archetypical phase' of the five phases of the symbol (5).<sup>1</sup> This stage involves the perpetual reoccurrence of a symbol to the extent where it is consistently recognizable within one's literary experience (von Hendy, 174). For Frye, this ultimately contributes to the 'displacement' of myth, where although the actual content of a story can be vastly different, the inscribed structural elements of the myth remain constant and recognizable (Russell, 84).

Comparable to Frye's 'principle of displacement,' Claude Levi-Strauss identified an apparent contradiction in that, although 'anything' can happen in mythic narratives,

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<sup>1</sup> Frye describes the literary symbol as, "[A]ny unit of any literary structure that can be isolated for critical attention." Frye outlines the five stages of symbolism as follows: the descriptive (signs), the literal (motifs), the formal (images), the archetypical (myth) and the anagogic (monad) (Russell, pg. 5).

myths of similar constitution and form are pervasive in far-reaching, remote locations (Csapo, 219; von Hendy, 232). Despite the apparent arbitrariness in the creation and conveyance of myth, the persisting structural components can be seen as inherently meaningful, thereby explaining their existence across cultures and geographic areas (Leach, 90). Levi-Strauss views the myth as analogous to the linguistic process in that it is comprised of gross constituent units that exist on a similar level to that of phonemes and morphemes in language (Levi-Strauss, 121). The creation of meaning lies not in the material contents of the signification, but rather the way in which they are combined that ultimately proves meaningful. According to Levi-Strauss, each constituent unit, or *mytheme*, exists as a group of sentences that, along with a collection of other *mythemes*, comprise an abstract system relating to the creation of myth (comparable to the Saussaurian concept of *langue*). Accordingly, the relating of a myth is an act of *parole*, where the storyteller must choose from the selection of available *mythemes* in order to foster an appropriate combination and create a meaningful narrative (Csapo, 220).

Levi-Strauss identifies those individuals with the license to recount myths as holding positions of importance and authority. If the storytellers operate within a realm of social influence, then myth can be seen as possessing an ideological potential, where the events and the message of the narrative are unconsciously viewed as powerful analogies to everyday life and influence individuals' daily behaviour (von Hendy, 288). Louis Althusser, although never explicitly defining it as a concept, most often refers to myth within a taxonomic framework, where a 'species' of narrative is meant to embody some part of the 'genus' ideology (289). In his description of the *Ideological State Apparatuses*, Althusser places ideology in the context of the State, asserting that, "...the

ideology by which [Ideological State Apparatuses] function is always unified, despite its diversity and contradictions, beneath the ruling ideology, which is the ideology of the 'ruling class,'" (Althusser, 139). Therefore, if the 'genus' ideology of which myth is a 'species' is considered in terms of the ideology of the 'ruling class,' there exists a correlation between the Althusserian Ideological State Apparatus and the authoritative function of myth as outlined by Levi-Strauss. In *Mythologies*, Barthes illuminates such a convergence by combining components of structuralist linguistics and Marxist political theory (Csapo, 277). The underlying goal of *Mythologies* is not simply to denounce particular ideological positions, but to analyze the constitution of these ideological significations and probe the means by which they obtain their persuasive force (Moriarty, 206).

### *Mythologies: A Recapitulation*

As outlined in chapter one, Roland Barthes' concept of myth involves the secondary articulation of a tri-dimensional pattern of signifier, signified and sign. This second-order system emerges from a previously existing and similarly structured chain of signification. The primary and initial combination of signifier and signified create a sign existing on the level of language (Barthes, 115). This linguistic sign can be viewed as serving a dual purpose: it first exists as the final term, or *meaning*, within the primary system of language, while also representing the first term, or *form*, of the secondary order of myth. From this linguistic sign (having been rearticulated as a new signifier) stems the second-order semiological system of myth (117). The process of mythic *signification* as defined by Barthes emerges from the *meaning* of the first-order linguistic system, which

then becomes endowed with new significance. This signification process is analogous to the semiotic dichotomy of denotation and connotation.

In *Mythologies*, Barthes illustrates the emergence of this second-order system by recounting a commonly cited incident that had taken place in a French barber shop. Barthes describes being offered a copy of *Paris-Match*, a popular French magazine. On the cover, a young black boy is dressed in a uniform typical of the French army and stands saluting an unseen object, which Barthes assumes to be the French flag. Barthes identifies this visual assemblage as the *meaning* of the image. However, Barthes also views this picture (most notably, the apparent pride shown by the boy in his salute) as signifying the glory of the French Empire and providing an authoritative answer for those opposed to its allegedly colonialist practices. Here, the previously constructed sign (the black boy saluting) is reused as a new signifier within the derivative semiological system of myth, and becomes associated with a set of new signifieds (the greatness of the French Empire and its military) (Barthes, 116).

According to Barthes, the inherent structures of myth entail a semiological conversion, where a fully-formed signification system (the linguistic sign, *meaning*) is captured through myth and thereby transformed into an “empty, parasitical *form*” (Barthes, 117). This regression represents the ideological properties of myth: it is read as a factual system, whereas it is a purely semiological one (131). By its very structure, myth forms an analogy relating the first-order sign (or *meaning*) and the second-order signified (or *concept*), despite there being no intrinsic connection between the two values. Additionally, Barthes explains that this analogical relationship is made increasingly accessible through the proliferation of fragmented and ambiguous images. Fully-formed

and unmistakable images work to “exclude” myth; their meaning necessitates limited interpretation and, therefore, the image cannot assume the factual or historical emptiness required for a semiological transformation to take place. In contrast, fragmentary images allow for the formation of countless analogies, which translates into a limitless supply of mythical signifiers (127).

Barthes identifies this transformation of *meaning* into *form* as a ‘language-robbery’; the *meaning* of the first semiological order is ultimately robbed of its historical status as a linguistic process (Barthes, 131). This suggests that the aforementioned ‘empty *form*’ of the mythical signifier is thereby thought of as lacking history. As Barthes affirms, myth is an historical entity, but it presents itself as neutral and innocent (125). The analogies that facilitate the secondary level of signification are not the result of a ‘natural’ signification process, but are themselves the products of cultural histories (127). Myth functions as a statement of natural fact, but stems from an historical concept. This is what Barthes identifies as the defining principle of myth: it transforms history into nature (129).

This naturalization through analogy is not an arbitrary process, but is a product, at least in part, of a motivated signification. Barthes draws a distinction between the arbitrariness of language (in that a natural relationship seldom exists between the phonetic construction of a word and the concept) and the motivated essence of myth (whereby some relationship, albeit a fragmented one, must exist between the *meaning* and the *form*). In myth, motivation is unavoidable and instils the duplicitous qualities necessary to generate an effective mythical analogy (Barthes, 126). Thus, myth functions as a type of speech that is defined by its intention rather than its literal use (124). In other

words, the text is characterized by its connotations, rather than its denotative properties. Both semiological systems, however, are completely manifest and perceptible. As Barthes states, the function of myth is not to 'hide,' but to 'distort.' The literal *meaning* of a text is distorted through analogy to become representative of some other intent. This process becomes naturalized and is equated with a representation of fact, where it can act as a veritable assertion of common sense (121). The black boy saluting the flag becomes mythical through an analogy with the typical French soldier and therefore becomes representative of the greatness of the French Empire, rather than acting as a symbol of the existence of a particular black boy.

For Barthes, the analogical process described above culminates in an 'exnominating' operation involving the dominant bourgeois social class. This *exnomination* is made possible when a mythic signification is perceived as ubiquitous to an extent where the identification of its bourgeois origins is no longer necessary (Barthes, 138). Therefore, bourgeois ideology can submerge all areas of meaning and, in doing so, eliminates the need for its own articulation (139). The bourgeoisie maintains its *exnomination* through the political vocabulary of *nation*, where it can obtain the ideological support of other classes through temporary allegiance based on a *national* discourse (138). Under the guise of nation, the unmitigated flow of mythical signifiers and analogies outlined by Barthes ultimately lends support to bourgeois ideals. In addition to political and social arenas, sport can be perceived as a vehicle for these types of ideological operations, which become noticeably manifest in baseball's established status as 'America's National Game.'

*The Origins of Baseball Mythology*

In 1845, Alexander J. Cartwright, a bank teller in New York City, codified and transcribed a set of rules by which his baseball club, the Knickerbockers, would play their weekday games. These rules featured many aspects borrowed from other local versions of the game. Despite these similarities, Cartwright's rules also contained specific elements, such as the distribution of nine players per side and the convention of retiring a runner by throwing the ball to the base before he arrived there, that were unique to the "New York game." This set of rules is believed to be the oldest existing incarnation of modern baseball and Cartwright is often credited as being the inventor of the contemporary game (Block, 20; Rossi, 7). In recent decades, however, research has illuminated evidence that seems to indicate that before Cartwright famously recorded the rules for the New York game, baseball had been evolving and transforming for centuries. Additionally, it has been suggested that other members of the Knickerbockers may have had larger roles in the formalization of the New York game than was initially believed. These revelations made claims as to Cartwright's sole invention difficult to substantiate (Block, 20).

The pursuit of a true history for the game of baseball has long existed as a site of struggle and intrigue from which countless questions regarding the sport's origins have arisen. Does a game's evolution defy the existence of a single inventor? What role can particular individuals or events play in the development of a sport? How does one account for local or historical variations? Despite attempts to posit accurate or definitive accounts of baseball's invention or evolution, the questions listed above, as well as several others, still remain highly contested and largely unresolved. However, one



particular account, its historical inaccuracy notwithstanding, managed to capture the American public consciousness and establish the historical underpinnings of baseball's mythology. The explanation of baseball's beginnings presented by A.G. Spalding throughout *America's National Game*, as well as in similar accounts, has operated as a foundational pillar for baseball's mythological narratives.

Spalding's account begins, however, with Henry Chadwick, who outlined the first extensive theory of baseball's origins on the pages of the sport's first annual guide in 1860. Chadwick proposed that baseball had been adapted from 'rounders,' an English stick and ball game that resembled baseball based on similarities in batting, fielding, pitching and base running (Block, 23). Chadwick's reputation as a renowned baseball writer and key figure in the continental growth of the sport earned him the title "Father of Baseball" and made his argument regarding its evolution a very convincing one (Rossi, 9). In 1888, almost thirty years after Chadwick's initial writings, John Montgomery Ward, a former baseball player and popular author, became the first to challenge Chadwick's account of baseball's beginnings. In a series of articles, Ward suggested that baseball had actually predated rounders and had undoubtedly spawned from the "inventive genius of an American boy" (Ward quoted in Block, 7). Not surprisingly, Chadwick took issue with Ward's position and the two authors engaged in fierce debate in newspapers and baseball publications throughout the last decade of the nineteenth century (Block, 7).

By this time a successful sporting goods entrepreneur, Spalding had for years been a proponent of Chadwick's 'rounders' explanation and had vocalized his support

upon returning from his first World Tour in 1878 (Levine, 112; Block, 10).<sup>2</sup> However, over time Spalding became increasingly convinced by arguments such as Ward's that proposed an American origin for baseball and began using his annual baseball guide as a platform to denounce Chadwick's account. Spalding began supporting a new position that suggested that baseball had descended from the American colonial games of 'town ball' or 'old cat.' These games possessed similar rules to rounders, but could vary based on the dimensions of the playing field and number of players (Block, 13; Rossi, 4). Most significantly, tracing baseball's genealogy from the colonial games of years past to its modern form coincided with Spalding's beliefs regarding the game as being representative of contemporary American values (Levine, 112). Spalding's newfound convictions led to the formation of the Mills Commission, with the aim of collecting all available historical evidence in order to arrive at a definitive decision as to baseball's origins (Levine, 113).

When the Commission was formed, professional baseball was enjoying an unprecedented period of prosperity. In 1902, an agreement between the long-established National League and the newly formed American League was reached to forgo the malicious business practices (most notably, the signing of players from the other league) that had been working to the detriment of both leagues since the American League's inception in 1899 (Rossi, 60, 68). The settlement led to the advent of the modern incarnation of the World Series, which was first played in 1903. The 1905 Series between the New York Giants and the Philadelphia Athletics was deemed a major financial

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<sup>2</sup> Spalding's World Tours were month long overseas expeditions, which featured rosters of Major League talent playing exhibition games in front of distinguished, foreign audiences. The most notable World Tour occurred in 1888, when Spalding took a star-studded roster of players (including the entire Chicago White Stockings team) on a tour through Australia, Egypt, Italy, France and the United Kingdom (Levine, 100-101).

success by both leagues and received substantial press coverage in the major daily newspapers (68). Between 1903 and 1908, attendance at Major League ballparks doubled to over seven million spectators per season (Riess, 5). With baseball's expanding popularity and a slew of those willing to invest in the game, Spalding's inquiry into the beginnings of the sport was certainly more than a footnote on the American public consciousness.

Officially appointed in 1905, The Mills Commission was chaired by former National League (NL) president Abraham G. Mills, who then hired James E. Sullivan to serve as secretary. Sullivan was the president of the Amateur Athletic Union and had previously served as operating manager of the American Sports Publishing Company, one of the many business interests owned by A.G. Spalding (Levine, 52, 113). The remaining members of the commission were handpicked by Spalding and included Al Reach, Spalding's business associate; George Wright, a former star player and brother of one of Spalding's former managers; former NL president Nick Young and Senators Arthur Gorman of Maryland and Morgan G. Bulkeley of Connecticut, both men also formerly holding office as presidents of the National League (113).

In July 1907, Spalding wrote to each member of the Commission regarding some correspondence he had received from a Denver mining engineer named Abner Graves (Levine, 113). It was in this letter from Graves to Spalding where the name Abner Doubleday is first mentioned as associated with the invention of baseball. In his letter, Graves purported that in 1839, he had witnessed a young Doubleday instruct a group of local Cooperstown boys how to play an improved version of town ball, which involved a four base infield and featured two opposing teams of equal size (Block, pg. 15). Despite

its anecdotal nature, the Mills Commission decided to use Graves' letter as the centrepiece of their report and cited his account as strong, if not irrefutable, evidence that baseball had been invented by Abner Doubleday in Cooperstown in 1839 (Block, 16; Levine, 114). The account put forth by the Mills Commission gained wide exposure and acceptance upon publication in the 1908 edition of Spalding's annual baseball guide and was also a focal point of *America's National Game* (Levine, 114-116).

When examining the reasoning behind the commission's choice of the Doubleday account, emphasis has been typically placed on Doubleday's service as a Northern officer in the Civil War and his subsequent rank of Major-General in the United States army (Levine, 114). However, research by Robert W. Henderson, which appeared in his 1939 article for the *Bulletin for the New York Public Library*, illuminates other intriguing coincidences that may have influenced the commission's decision. According to Henderson, Mills and Doubleday were members of the same New York post of the General Army of the Republic (GAR), the organization for veterans of the Civil War. Meanwhile, Spalding was a leading figure within the same theosophical society in which Doubleday once held a prominent position (Block, 34-35).

Most importantly, however, Henderson's research also provided extensive evidence illustrating that rules and descriptions similar to that which Doubleday was credited had existed years before his supposed invention (Block, 18). Subsequent research has further discredited any role Doubleday was alleged to have played in baseball's development (Cogliano, 149; Levine, 113; Mandelbaum, 64). Despite embellishments and factual discrepancies in their version of baseball's origins, facets of

the Mills Commission's account have nevertheless been widely incorporated as foundational aspects of the mythology of baseball.

### *Barthesian Baseball*

Despite being widely discredited, the Mills Commission's suggestion that baseball had been invented by a young boy living in a small, rural community, served to confirm pre-existing beliefs as to the innocence of youth and the benefits of agrarian life. Ultimately, the relationship between baseball, childhood and a rural existence has played a significant role in the way that the sport is represented and perceived. The founding of the National Baseball Hall of Fame in the centennial year of Doubleday's supposed invention, and on the alleged site of the occurrence, stands as testament to the magnitude of the account proposed by Spalding and the Mills Commission (Vlasich 1996, 228-229). Although baseball, in its most renowned form, is played by professionals in cavernous urban venues, the story of Abner Doubleday and the sport's corresponding myths have forged an inextricable link between baseball and distinct notions of youth and a distant, agrarian past.

Using Barthes' concept of myth as defined in *Mythologies*, it is possible to illuminate the ways in which these associations are formed as a secondary level of signification. As Barthes states, the primary or initial combination of signifier and signified create a sign existing on the level of language and contribute to the creation of a linguistic 'meaning' (Barthes, 115-117). For instance, in the discourse of baseball, common terminology (such as 'field' or 'ballpark') as well as elements of the rules of play (such as the dimensions or layout of the field) act as meanings on the Barthesian

level of language. The term 'field' or clauses in the rulebook are linguistic signifiers.

Where 'field' signifies baseball's playing surface (or one's mental representation of that space), the rulebook clause is seen as representing the implementation of that rule during an actual game.

As outlined in *Mythologies*, this 'meaning' on the level of language also functions as the 'form' on the secondary level of myth. Thus, the first order 'meanings' of a baseball field or the rules for the field's dimensions, for instance, now act as components of a second-order signification process. These can be seen as representing the sport's association with an agrarian past, and, most importantly, an element of baseball's mythology. The term 'field' not only identifies the space on which a baseball game is played, but also evokes connotations of the outdoors and land used to grow crops: the farmer's field. The mixture of green grass and brown dirt that makes up this field is similarly reminiscent of such a rural setting (Mandelbaum, 42).

The rules which denote the dimensions of the field produce a comparable effect. The standardization of the infield, with its carefully measured base paths and pitcher's mound, stands as a symbol of domestication encompassed by the vast, open and unconquered outfield (Lamoreaux, 598). Consequently, the outfield resists standardization. There are no rules as to its dimensions and the possible asymmetry can have a direct effect on the game's outcome. Features or dimensions of a field can be advantageous or detrimental to a team's fortunes based on the specific abilities of its players; for instance, a player's tendency to hit the ball to a certain part of the field (Mandelbaum, 43). The lack of spatial definition and theoretically limitless space evokes connotations of the rural countryside and exists as an inextricable component of

baseball's mythology (Lamoreaux, 598). A re-emphasis on baseball's ties to the essence and imagery of rural life is evident in the recent move away from massive, multi-purpose 'stadiums,' often featuring artificial playing surfaces, and the subsequent return to smaller, more traditional 'ballparks' outfitted with natural grass.

These associations are not exclusive to baseball's venues, but rather co-exist within the mythology alongside characteristics of the game play and its players. As outlined in chapter one, baseball is a sport not governed by a clock and can, due to this lack of set length, proceed at a leisurely pace. As Mandelbaum writes, this freedom from time reflects an agricultural world preceding the advent of precisely measured time and wages paid by the hour. This suggests that baseball is more likely to develop according to the rhythm of nature, rather than any artificial increments of time. Thus, the key junctures of the baseball season can be seen to mirror those of the growing season. Just as the agricultural cycle is divided into spring, summer and fall seasons, the baseball season has a similar progression with spring training, the All-Star game in midsummer and the World Series in the fall (Mandelbaum, 41).

These connotations are furthered when considering the value that was once placed on a baseball player's rural origins. The sport can be viewed as a preservation of the 'country boy': a motif seen as displaying not only a high level of natural physical ability, but cultural and moral purity (Crepeau, 320). Similarly, in the formative years of professional baseball, returning home to the 'country' at the conclusion of the season was believed to be a crucial part of the player's yearly routine (319). In 1924, a feature editorial in *The Sporting News* magazine paid tribute to the 'rural essence' of baseball and proclaimed that the greatest pitchers of the game's previous era had grown up *en*

*masse* in the rural Midwest. The claims made in *The Sporting News*, as well as other influential sports publications, stand as examples of how sports journalists drew special attention to the rural origins of baseball players, extolled the virtues of agrarian life and condemned the corrupting forces of urbanization (315).

In 1920, the United States census reported that the country's population was for the first time predominantly urban (Mandelbaum, 80). Thus, anti-urban sentiment was propagated through the discourse of baseball and centred on the money and greed that was perceived to be characteristic of urban metropolises such as New York. The corruption rampant in big cities was juxtaposed with the tranquility and integrity of those continuing to live a peaceful, agrarian lifestyle (Crepeau, 320-321). Baseball's myths reflect how the sport was used as a forum to promote and display the virtues of rural life during this period of transition in the history of the United States. Although professional baseball is played in sprawling urban centres and is, for the most part, controlled by 'big city' interests, the sport's mythology unquestionably emanates from the countryside (Mandelbaum, 40; Skolnik, 9; Riess, 8).

Although originating geographically in a distinctly rural space, baseball's chronological onset occurs in one's childhood and, correspondingly, the sport has forged a deep-seated link with notions of an idyllic youth. As Richard Skolnik states, the development of connotations tying baseball to the irrepressible innocence of childhood have allowed it to be perceived as the sport of the young (Skolnik, 10). The connotations were also furthered by writings featured in popular sports publications which, as done by a 1927 article in *The Sporting News*, for example, emphasized the significant relationship between baseball and the typical small-town boy (Crepeau, 328).



The rise of baseball in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century was part of a newfound interest in attending and participating in sporting events. Young people were especially encouraged to begin playing baseball, and ultimately, baseball became a universal signifier for childhood. Second-order signification processes involving baseball and the innocence of youth have become entrenched in baseball's mythology. In addition to aiding children in constructing their identities, this association, also gave adults an opportunity to relive their childhood by engaging in the sport (Lamoreaux, 597). A common interest in baseball provided a chance for fathers and sons to relate to each other as 'friends' and facilitated a new type of patriarchal family relationship (Riess, 43). Fathers and sons, rather than husbands and wives, are seen as the ideal baseball audience and, therefore, baseball is not only a child's rite of passage, but a father's rite of paternity (Riess, 47; Skolnik, 10).

George O. Carney, in his article 'Cow Pasture Baseball' (1998), describes how the cultural landscape of his childhood was defined through baseball and the geographic landmarks that emerged through his experience with the sport. Carney also explores the bonding that took place with his father through their joint organization of a Little League team. He mentions that, being one of several boys growing up in a rural Midwestern community, his relationship with baseball was by no means atypical. Carney's account illustrates how notions of baseball, childhood and life in the country are often unmistakably intertwined.

The inclusion of aspects of youth and an agrarian past is facilitated through the aforementioned signification processes that involve descriptions of games or players, baseball's documented rules and, in the case of Abner Doubleday, historical accounts of

the sport's origins or invention. However, visual imagery portraying baseball can also be seen as exhibiting the second level of signification as outlined by Barthes, and exists as a key component of baseball's mythology. Image 1 captures a scene before the 1949 Major League All-Star Game played at Ebbets Field in Brooklyn, New York on the 12<sup>th</sup> July. Pictured (from left to right) are Roy Campanella, Larry Doby, Don Newcombe and Jackie Robinson. Campanella, Newcombe and Robinson represented the National League side as members of the Brooklyn Dodgers, where Doby played for the American League squad as a member of the Cleveland Indians. The photo, although seemingly meant to do little more than display an historic image of this event, also represents visual elements of baseball's overarching mythology.

The four players are positioned in a distinct pose resting on one knee with both arms neatly folded over each other. This stance, combined with the collective presence of wide, toothy grins on the part of all four men, renders them in an innocent, childhood pose. Their body position is arguably more reminiscent of an elementary school class portrait than an image taken before a world-class sporting event. Furthermore, in the dugout directly behind the players is a young man wearing a Brooklyn Dodgers cap seated next to an older man, who appears to be speaking. Although no details are provided as to the context or content of this background scene, using baseball as the cultural frame, it is possible to infer that this image depicts a father-son (or grandfather-grandson) interaction, and a classic example of males of different generations bonding over baseball.

In terms of rural imagery within this photograph, the manner in which Robinson leans on his bat can be equated to the way in which a tired worker would lean on a shovel



**Image 1 - Campanella, Doby, Newcombe and Robinson at 1949 All-Star Game  
(Bettman/Corbis)**

or garden hoe. Similarly, the unmarked and trodden dirt at the player's feet has no visible markings of a baseball field and could very well infinitely stretch out into the rural countryside. Although presented with a nondescript dirt foreground, the backdrop of the dugout and the Ebbets Field bleachers provides a substantial visible cue that allows the viewer to assume that this photo has been taken on a baseball field, and not in a farmer's field. The subtle, yet powerful, connotations of childhood and agrarian life produced by this photograph stand as robust examples of the means by which representations of baseball myth (and the requisite second-order signification processes) can emerge from seemingly mundane or everyday images of the sport.

However, it must be noted that the predominant rationale behind the Mills Commission's decision to anoint Doubleday as baseball's inventor was his American origin and his status as an upstanding member of the United States Army. The connotations produced by written, verbal and visual representations of the game are not entirely universal and ultimately work to present a distinctly American version of these associations. This allows baseball to become a vehicle for the advancement and propagation of a particular American value system.

### *Baseball as American Mythology*

In a well known and widely cited quotation from his 1954 text *God's Country and Mine*, French-American cultural historian Jacques Barzun says of the United States, "Whoever wants to know the hearts and mind of America, had better learn baseball," (Barzun as quoted in Riess, 1). Using comparable logic, President Franklin Delano Roosevelt decreed in 1942 that, despite the nation's involvement in a fierce international

conflict, professional baseball should and would continue. Roosevelt's suggestion that baseball would provide a universal and irreplaceable boost of morale for Americans sheds light on the role of the sport in American life, and stands as an example of a belief in the natural and historical presence of baseball as 'America's Game' (Cogliano, 153-154).

Over thirty years prior to President Roosevelt's declaration, A.G. Spalding was proclaiming similar truths in his book *America's National Game*. Only three pages into the 600 page document, Spalding writes that there is no need to prove that baseball is America's national game as it clearly "has all the attributes of American origin and American character," (Spalding as quoted in Levine, 118). Spalding continues by equating a statement pronouncing baseball as America's game with making "a solemn declaration that two plus two equals four" (Spalding as quoted in Levine, 118). Not surprisingly, it can be assumed that some of the goals of *America's National Game* were to draw inextricable links between the sport of baseball and American values, as well as illustrating how these cultural entities were mutually expressive and productive. As Spalding states, "I claim that Base Ball owes its prestige as our National Game to the fact, as no other form of sport, it is the exponent of American courage, confidence, combativeness; American dash, discipline and determination etc." (Spalding as quoted in Cogliano, 145).

Spalding's assertions regarding the relationship between baseball and the values of American society also appear in several editions of his *Official Baseball Guide*, which for over half a century was considered the sport's most influential annual publication (Cogliano, 148). As a persuasive promoter and shrewd businessman during years crucial

to the sport's development, Spalding's work was instrumental in the emergence of baseball as a prominent social institution seen as representing an American way of life (Levine, 99; 113). It is in a similar fashion that the story of Abner Doubleday came to embody the notion that baseball was rooted in American ideals and was a product of an American invention (Ogden, 66).

It was Spalding's recognition of the social power of sport that encouraged the selection of the Doubleday account and contributed to baseball's status as an arena for the transmission of a particular value system. Primarily seeking to expand the reach of his various baseball related enterprises, Spalding understood how emphasizing baseball's intrinsic promotion of self-discipline and order would resonate with the sport's audience and could thereby lead to greater business success (Levine, 99). However, Spalding also strongly believed in the values he was endorsing through baseball and appreciated that, as Levine states, if the sport "truly had a special contribution to make in the shaping of American character, its pedigree had to be impeccably American" (112).

Therefore, the signification involved in the creation of baseball's 'mythology' presents meanings and establishes sign systems which carry distinctly American associations. For instance, the rural connotations described in the previous section facilitate nostalgia for the agrarian United States of a distant, unspecified past and evoke or create memories of the American countryside (Levine, 147). The characteristics of American agricultural production are also suited to the common perceptions of baseball. As Mandelbaum writes, the European system of agriculture often relies on an agricultural collective, where farming is sustained through the maintenance of familial and political relationships. In contrast, the United States system is largely individualistic and involves

few complex social networks and the availability of free, unclaimed sources of wealth (Mandelbaum, 53). Such an arrangement leads to a character type that is encountered exclusively in American imagery and discourses: the 'rugged individual.' This character stands as independent and self-reliant, and, while being embedded in baseball's mythology, is believed to be exemplified by the game's players (54).

The presence of the rugged individual within baseball allows links between its agricultural roots, as well as images of the American frontier, to be forged as part of its mythology. Baseball's emergence as a popular spectator sport coincides with the growing circulation of popular dime novels involving cowboys and legends of the 'Old West.' Accordingly, much of baseball's mythology overlaps with the idealized characteristics of the American frontier. Baseball's fields, as fenced-in and thinly populated grassy areas, evokes images of cow pastures or the cultural notion of 'the range.' Similarly, the oft-repeated one-on-one competition between the batter and the pitcher can be seen as reminiscent of the legendary gun duels of the Old West. In addition, the requirement for players to wear hats as part of their uniform fosters an association to the trademark ten gallon hats typified by Western cowboys (Skolnik, 31-33).

The characteristics evident in the American frontier myth translate into a distinctly individual model of success. Similar to the qualities promoted by the American business world, the myth of baseball also values the trope of the 'self-made man' as the accepted route to individual achievement and accomplishment. Baseball is in the same way presented as a vehicle for cultivating prominent American virtues such as humility, perseverance, courage, self-reliance and initiative. These traits, although relevant in the realms of business and industry, are components of a character type most often perceived

as emerging from the American frontier (Sojka, 113). In baseball, the element most reflective of this frontier individualism is the common act of batting and the web of statistics it produces. In other sports, it is virtually impossible to isolate the contribution each team member makes to the outcome of a game or a particular play. A batter, however, receives limited help from other teammates as he bats, thus allowing his accomplishments to be more accurately and individually measured (Mandelbaum, 55).

The combination of rural and frontier imagery leads to a notion of baseball success as accessible to anyone with enough perseverance and initiative (Riess, 7). Such a notion eliminates potential barriers of class and ethnicity, which portrays baseball as a purely integrative and democratic game. In this respect, baseball is perceived as an agent of social mobility, where any individual can achieve success regardless of social standing (Cogliano, 147; Riess, 8; Edwards, 141). The integrative nature of the sport and its representations of meritocracy exist as crucial components of baseball mythology and did not go unnoticed by A.G. Spalding who, in *America's National Game*, wrote frankly, "baseball is a democratic game" (Spalding as quoted in Levine, 118). The American baseball dream can be viewed as a subsection of the larger-scale American dream (Koppett, 213). Both myths are instilled in the days of youth and supposedly operate as universal and applicable to any American citizen. However, the popularity of baseball and the pre-eminence of its mythology as a facet of life in the United States were a result of how it coincided with the cultural and religious values of the American white middle class (Riess, 5).



*The Cultural Politics of American Baseball*

In the early 1900s, rapidly increased immigration, urbanization and the politics which accompanied life in the city posed a threat to the predominance of traditional middle class values such as rugged individualism and self-reliance. The possibility of a shift in the prevailing American self-conception was seen as troublesome by the white Anglo-Saxon majority in the United States. However, optimistic reformers believed that cultural institutions could be used as stabilizing forces to correct social, political and economic anxieties. Sports, especially baseball, were viewed as a crucial component of this process (Riess, 6). A.G. Spalding was also a proponent of the notion that baseball could act as vehicle for communicating white middle class values. In an Australian edition of his Annual Baseball Guide, Spalding asserts that “All of those essentials of manliness, courage, nerve, pluck and endurance, characteristics of the Anglo-Saxon race” were embedded in baseball (Spalding as quoted in Levine, 103).

As outlined by Riess in *Touching Base*, the baseball myth being presented by Spalding and other prominent sportswriters appealed directly to the white Anglo-Saxon middle class and their need to secure order during a tumultuous and transitional period in American history (Riess, 6). Baseball’s fan base consisted mostly of those from the white middle class who could relate to the images of rural America presented by the sport, and would have also experienced childhood summers dominated by baseball (46). These mainstream Americans accepted baseball’s rhetoric without questioning its assumptions because the mythology neatly coalesced with their social and political worldview (52-53). Furthermore, baseball’s social doctrine enabled the equating of personal success with spiritual purity; a principle which illustrates how baseball not only caters to the white

Anglo Saxon middle class, but can also be seen as presenting a White Anglo-Saxon Protestant version of American life (Riess, 225; Sojka, 113; Levine, 146).

Baseball's mythology, while being a white, middle class and protestant construction, is also commonly restricted to the male members of this privileged group. Perceptions of participating in, as well as following, sports directly emanate from a culture's commonly held notions of gender (Pierman, 100). Therefore, baseball's cultural associations are defined in male terms and the sport presents a distinctly male mythology. Spalding even goes so far as to decree in *America's National Game* that baseball is far "too strenuous for womankind" (Spalding as quoted in Pierman, 100). Similarly, in the face of increasing bureaucratization and a shift away from manual labour, participating in baseball provided an outlet for middle-class men to assert their masculinity by displaying degrees of toughness, aggression and skill (Riess, 4, 23).

In the late nineteenth and early decades of the twentieth century, it was seen as unnatural for females to develop any sense of athleticism beyond a certain acceptable level. Furthermore, sports for women were supposed to be private and individual, placing an emphasis on form rather than strenuous effort (Pierman, 102-103). As illustrated by the previous passage from *America's National Game*, the common conception regarding the acceptable degree of athleticism for females stood at odds with the perceived relationship between baseball and masculinity.

The correlations between the constraints placed on female athletes and the traditional notions of gender promoted by the mythology of baseball have in many ways persisted several decades after any contributions made by Spalding and his contemporaries. To 'throw like a girl' has become a harsh, albeit playful, criticism and it

is suggested within feminist circles that the phrase embodies the implication that something is being done wrong (Fallows, 76). As Fallows indicates, the discrepancy may stem from the lack of opportunities for little girls to find themselves in environments where throwing skills are required. In contrast, young boys are encouraged and cultivated to be good throwers, often in baseball-specific situations (Fallows, 79). During the brief existence of the All-American Girls Professional Baseball League (AAGPBL), founder P.K. Wrigley went to great lengths to stress the femininity of the league's players in order to combat the conception that women who played baseball, and ,therefore, personified the sport's mythology were automatically and irreversibly masculinized (Berlage, 243; Daniels, 35).

The previous examples of the AAGPBL and 'throwing like a girl' illuminate the ways in which baseball's cultural connotations are exclusive to males, and how the myth is, by definition, a male one. This gender dichotomy can even be seen, as Chafetz and Kataha describe, in the behaviour of Little League baseball parents. For Little League teams, it is common for fathers to be assigned on-field duties, where mothers are given off-field tasks such as designing uniforms and social event planning (Chafetz & Kataha, 47). Therefore, if the mythology of baseball is meant to promote a sense of community, it is seen as instilling values of brotherhood and fraternity, rather than a universal collective.

For those such as Spalding, baseball was seen as a powerful means to resist the burgeoning immigrant populations of American cities and their contrasting value systems by facilitating widespread exposure to 'Anglo-Saxon ideals' (Ogden, 320). Cogliano views baseball's penchant for elevating American values as superior to all other cultural

systems as a continuation of John Winthrop's 'City on a Hill' doctrine. If the United States of America were to be an example for the rest of the world to emulate, then baseball, as its 'national game,' would be a crucial resource in nurturing the citizens who act as its representatives (Cogliano, 146-147).

Regarding sport as an acculturating device is not a concept exclusive to baseball or to the United States. In the nineteenth century, English private schools adopted organized sports and other team games as part of their curricula in hopes of cultivating great men of character who would then be incorporated into the military (Mandelbaum, 13). In the United States, President Andrew Jackson was a leading proponent of sport as a valuable activity that encouraged healthy behaviour, sound morals and an honourable character (Riess, 21). Decades later when promoting his 'Strenuous Life Theory,' President Theodore Roosevelt identified baseball as an especially ameliorative pursuit for the game's players. Furthermore, being a baseball fan was a recommended alternative to other forms of escapist entertainment such as theatres or amusement parks, and was also believed to be an acceptable way to introduce new immigrants to the American way of life (29).

In the years following Roosevelt's presidency and with the United States rapidly transforming into a modern industrial state, baseball was specifically seen as being capable of mitigating many of the issues inherent in such a transition (Levine, 97). In particular, A.G. Spalding continually encouraged middle-class Americans to regard baseball as a legitimate leisure time pursuit that could simultaneously exist as a route to physical fitness and a positive social initiative (Levine, 109). The common perception of baseball as benefiting society as a whole and being more than a frivolous misuse of free

time stood as fundamental grounds for baseball's expanded popularity in its early years as a professional and participatory sport (Riess, 19).

First, baseball promoted a sense of civic pride. The local franchise was crucial to fostering a city's reputation and was believed to be a reliable marker of the regional or national status of a given place. Similarly, players on these teams were seen to represent the character of a town or city's residents (Riess, 22). Second, and most importantly, baseball was viewed as a non-contact sport that did not lend itself to aggression or emotional excess. The sport emphasizes self-control and the mental facets of strategy, which allowed it to forge an association with upstanding moral behaviour, preparing boys and young men for their future roles as society's leaders (Lamoreaux, 600-602; Riess, 22; Levine, 97). Furthermore, in learning proper adult male behaviour, young boys were instructed to emulate the quick thinking, sacrifice and respect for authority exhibited by professional players (Riess, 25).

Accordingly, the desired process of hero emulation necessitates particular characteristics which combine to construct an ideal player to portray these sensibilities. The on-field behaviour of sports stars is seen in many ways to be more authentic than the accomplishments of movie stars and musicians because games are relatively spontaneous compared to predetermined scripts or songs (Mandelbaum, 10). The feats of athletes possess powerful associations that can be translated into signifiers of their off-field behaviour. For this reason, sports heroes often stand as models for acculturation and reinforce cultural ideals that transcend sports and are applicable to society as whole (Trujillo, 57). Sports heroes perform deeds of great athleticism, but can also be used

effectively to exemplify what are presented as being universally desirable traits of character (Mandelbaum, 12).

In a speech given prior to the launch of his first World Tour, A.G. Spalding declared regarding the process of selecting players for the American team, “It was absolutely essential that all who go should be men of clean habits and attractive personality, men who would reflect credit upon the country and the game,” (Spalding as quoted in Levine, 101). Similar to Spalding’s wish to have baseball’s ‘ambassadors’ be men of upstanding morals, similar criteria were invoked when evaluating players on American soil. Where it was seen as natural for baseball heroes to attain success through hard work, courage, self-reliance and determination, they were also presented as men of clean deportment and honourable character (Riess, 25, 224).

As Trujillo outlines in his examination of the imagery associated with Hall of Fame pitcher Nolan Ryan, baseball players, besides being portrayed as men of great athletic achievement and physical endurance, are presented as wholesome and ‘down to Earth’ models of the protestant work ethic. The ideal player evokes parallels to the classic American cowboy, and correspondingly, a player’s rural roots (as alluded to previously in this chapter) are often emphasized (Trujillo, 62-64). Although Trujillo uses Nolan Ryan as the archetypal example, this phenomenon is very easily perceptible in other past and current players including legendary pitcher Christy Mathewson (Riess, 26) or former Chicago Cubs second basemen Ryne Sandberg (Tudor, 17-27). Even members of the baseball’s administration such as the fabled patriarch of the Black Sox scandal, Kennesaw Mountain Landis, can be praised for possessing the types of noble qualities which are perceived as emanating from humble rural origins (Ogden, 71; Riess, 224).

### *Baseball in Popular Culture*

Baseball writers capitalize on these conceptions and use archetypal characters such as Ryan, Mathewson and Landis to communicate ideological truths about the American experience. However, baseball's mythology transcends the reach of the sports pages and has greatly infiltrated other influential facets of popular culture. In the early twentieth century, popular works of American juvenile sports fiction, such as the Baseball Joe or Frank Merriwell series, portrayed baseball heroes as strong and moral figures who reinforced the protestant work ethic and a 'rags to riches' dream of affluence (Graber, 1108; Sojka, 113). These baseball stories set a moral standard for the young to emulate by providing a pure and uncorrupted 'country boy' protagonist who achieves success through noble and honourable actions. Works of children's fiction such as Frank Merriwell portrayed a similar vision of the model American hero to the images believed to be represented by professional baseball players (Sojka, 113-114).

Although the most well known baseball song is arguably the traditional arrangement of Jack Norworth's "Take Me Out to the Ball Game" (1904), popular songs expounding the merits of baseball and its heroes have surfaced across several musical genres. Notables such as "Did You See Jackie Robinson Hit That Ball?" by Buddy Johnson (1940), "Joltin' Joe Dimaggio" by Alan Courtney and Ben Homer (1941) and "Glory Days" by Bruce Springsteen (1984) employ baseball as primary subject matter. Simon and Garfunkel's hit "Mrs. Robinson" (1968) contains the lyrics "Where have you gone Joe Dimaggio?/Our nation turns its lonely eyes to you" and stands as a principal example of baseball's mythological theme of longing for an America of years past.

Similarly, baseball heroism and its overarching mythology has also been the subject of several popular films such as *Pride of the Yankees* (Sam Wood, 1942), *The Natural* (Barry Levinson, 1984) and *Field of Dreams* (Phil Alden Robinson, 1989) (McGimpsey, 2000; Gehring, 2004; Most & Rudd, 2006; Tudor, 1997). Perhaps the most intriguing example of baseball's mythology on film is the speech given by Terrence Mann (James Earl Jones) in *Field of Dreams*, in which he passionately states, "This field, this game, is a part of our past, Ray. It reminds us of all that was good and it could be again." Popular culture texts such as *Field of Dreams*, Frank Merriwell and "Mrs. Robinson," undisputedly share the same mythological themes found in the work of prominent baseball writers and promoters such as A.G. Spalding. However, works of popular culture can be seen to possess an even greater strength because they have the potential to reach those who would not normally consider themselves baseball fans.

The idealized images offered by baseball's mythology, although being influential and pervasive, are not necessarily accurate. As Barthes writes regarding mythical significations and their tendency to be presented as neutral and devoid of cultural history, the components of baseball myth are similarly portrayed as innate facets of American life. Baseball is perceived as undisputedly American. The rural, child-like and integrative aspects of the mythology are seen to be natural facts, rather than constructions manufactured by those such as Spalding, countless sports writers and the cultural industries.

For instance, the aforementioned speech performed by James Earl Jones as Terrence Mann in *Field of Dreams*, displays the character of Mann, a supposedly radical African-American writer, passionately extolling the virtues of baseball as a reminder of



“all that was good can be good again.” However, while delivering his address, Mann ignores the conspicuous absence of any African-American player standing behind him on the idealized “field of dreams” (Tudor, 168). A comparable phenomenon can be observed in Major League Baseball’s portrayal of Jackie Robinson. As Ogden affirms, Major League Baseball ‘freezes the image of Robinson’ as a representation of a universal and untroubled African American presence in contemporary baseball. In this way, images of Robinson are ‘drained’ of their history and devoid of the hardships and fear that Robinson experienced during his early career as a Brooklyn Dodger (Ogden, 73).

In Image 1, the boyish grins displayed by the four African American players captured at the proud occasion of an integrated All-Star game erases the discrimination encountered by each player and the decades of segregated baseball that had taken place prior to Robinson’s rookie season. Baseball purports to present a mythology which portrays universal truths about American life. However, the experiences of those such as Robinson and the diversity of the baseball playing public allow for the emergence of other baseball myths that run counter to, or directly oppose, the game’s longstanding, traditional mythology.

#### *Contradictions and Counter-Myths:*

Despite the alleged universality of American baseball and the pervasiveness of archetypal figures within the sport’s discourse, there exist several instances where players, although white and Anglo-Saxon, appear to contradict baseball’s mythology. By exhibiting brash and repulsive behaviour, such as drinking, gambling and womanizing, these players contrast the honourable and moral characters that were envisioned by

Spalding and his contemporaries as the ideal player. However, some of these players, including Ty Cobb, ‘Shoeless’ Joe Jackson and Babe Ruth, assume the role of ‘loveable rogue;’ their immoral behaviour is either ignored or mythologized to allow these prominent players access to baseball’s mythological sign systems.

Although reportedly paranoid, quick to anger and notoriously bigoted, Cobb was portrayed as exemplifying traditional baseball values through an emphasis on his tireless work ethic (Riess, 198; Teitelbaum, 234). Cobb’s diligence, demonstrated by hour after hour of strenuous practice, illustrated the importance of hard work in getting ahead. Joe Jackson was implicated in the 1919 Black Sox scandal, an incident which stands as one of baseball’s most infamous and disgraceful episodes. However, in recent accounts such as Eliot Asinof’s *Eight Men Out*, Jackson is portrayed as an innocent and naïve ‘country boy’ who had been victimized by the vices and deceit of the big city (Teitelbaum, 37; Nathan, 86-88, 113).

Babe Ruth, while being the most well known player of his era, was also a man of large appetites. Some of them – for food and drink, for instance – were widely publicized. Others – such as for female companionship – were continuously downplayed and excluded from newspaper coverage based on a code of discretion that existed among baseball journalists (Mandelbaum, 70). Ruth became a different type of baseball hero. Instead of focusing on his womanizing and boorish behaviour, sportswriters mythologized him as an ‘ingenuous man-child’ – a characterization that mocked prohibition laws and Old World conservatism, while complementing the humble and honourable traits displayed by Ruth’s Yankee teammate Lou Gehrig (Riess, 224).

Therefore, these players were incorporated into the existing White Anglo-Saxon Protestant baseball myth. This was accomplished by de-emphasizing the facets of their character that contradicted the mythology, while strongly promoting the traits they did display such as youthfulness, rural origins or hard work. These 'loveable rogues' are attempts by the dominant White Anglo-Saxon Protestant majority to maintain control over the meanings associated with the representations of a cherished social institution. There exist several myths, however, which are held among the cultures of different ethnicities. These myths hold distinctive relationships with baseball that can run counter or directly oppose the mythology accepted by white mainstream Americans and Major League Baseball.

As previously illustrated, the image of Jackie Robinson has been appropriated by white Anglo-Saxon protestant America as means of giving credence to baseball's integrative and democratic myths. However, such incorporation does not prevent African Americans from forging their own baseball myth involving similar figures such as Robinson. In 1920, former Chicago American Giant player Rube Foster formed the National Negro League citing a need to "keep coloured baseball away from the control of whites" (Tygiel, 68). For African Americans in the League's heyday, the Negro League stood as a social institution that forcefully rejected the doctrines of Social Darwinism. The Negro League and its players symbolized African American self-reliance and Black Nationalism, while helping to sustain an assertive black culture separate from mainstream White America (Ruck & Ruck, 179).

Furthermore, the Negro League embodied the state of 'two-ness' or 'double-voiced-ness' representative of the African American experience, where one was an

American, but also a 'negro.' The pioneers of black baseball envisioned the Negro League as being emblematic of this dual identity. The Negro League simultaneously created viable business enterprises that served black communities, while managing to achieve a measure of success that could gain acceptance and respectability within broader American society (Tygiel, 69). The black baseball player worked to personify African American frustrations with second class citizenship and forge a collective resistance to white supremacy (McDaniels III, 193). This act of resistance was most prominently accomplished through the desire to prove that African American players could perform at the same, if not superior, level to white Major League players (195).

However, after the signing of Jackie Robinson by the Dodgers in 1947, the focus of the black baseball consciousness shifted from exclusivity to integration (Tygiel, 87). The increased focus on the successes of black players in the Major Leagues made the Negro League lose much of its symbolic power as an African American cultural institution (85-87). The Negro League's subsidence facilitated a change in baseball's role in African American culture. Economic and social factors, as well as compelling marketing and media initiatives, swayed African American youth towards sports requiring less time, space and proper facilities (Ogden & Rose, 227). The African American myth of 'making it' now involves honing one's skills on an urban playground and achieving career and financial success by playing professional basketball or football (335-236). These shifting values have been perpetuated by parents, coaches and teachers and have resulted in fewer African American youth playing baseball. Consequently, the African American presence on Major League rosters has also dwindled, providing few

prominent role models for black youth interested in the sport (Ogden & Rose, 230; Gregorian, 2006; Comeaux & Harrison, 2004).

A reverse phenomenon can be observed when examining baseball's presence in Latin America. Since American colonialism and military expansion brought the sport to these Caribbean nations, the game has undergone a massive growth in popularity. Baseball in many ways has been appropriated and subsequently 'Latinized,' becoming a cultural tradition particular to Latin America (Klein 1995, 114-115). For instance, the preference for line drives and stolen bases favours a tempo that is far different than one that is produced by the American inclination to play for the home run (115). This appropriation has allowed baseball to take on nationalist and cultural associations that, in effect, promote a type of resistance to dominant American influences that is similar to the symbolism African Americans found in the Negro League.

Building on the cultural traditions of baseball, countries such as Cuba, Venezuela and the Dominican Republic have developed their own teams and leagues, which feature rosters of prolific and talented players. Since the 1950s, many of these players have been scouted and signed by Major League teams, resulting in long and successful careers playing in the United States. Thus, the Latin American dream of being signed to a Major League contract and escaping the widespread poverty of their homeland is rampant within the baseball cultures of these nations (Regalado 2001, 73; Klein 1995, 123). However, those who are given the opportunity to play in the United States often encounter unbridled discrimination and have experienced difficulty adapting to the linguistic and cultural unfamiliarity with which they are faced (Regalado 2002, 19-21). There also often exist cultural contradictions regarding acceptable displays of male

bravado or 'machismo' because Latin players are perceived as more likely to show their emotions. This, compounded by the tendency for Latin American players to have an easy going attitude towards the game, causes these players to obtain the labels 'head case' or 'hot-blooded.' Such an association would naturally stand at odds to the American mythological ideal of a hardworking, humble and emotionally reserved player (Klein 1999, 102; Klein 1991, 152).

In Japan, cultural emphasis is placed on the coherence of the group and loyalty to the team. Correspondingly, players train as a team year round and seldom are seen showing anger on the field or demanding more money from their team's ownership (Mandelbaum, 57). Japanese players are expected to be passive and polite, and are instructed to be team-oriented in their approach to hitting, rather than selfishly swinging for home runs (Kuwahara, 56). The structure and style of the Japanese Leagues reflect these cultural expectations. However, players who have achieved success in the Major Leagues are currently treated as heroes in Japanese popular culture. This migration of the country's best players has contributed to a greater interest in American baseball in Japan and sparked criticism of the traditional Japanese baseball culture.

The existence of players who appear to contradict baseball's myths, as well as counter-myths that forge differing relationships with baseball based on ethnicity or nationality, call into question the supposed universality of traditional baseball mythology. As illustrated by sportswriters' portrayal of 'loveable rogues' and Major League Baseball's positioning of Jackie Robinson, the presence of counter-myths can also be perceived as ultimately reinforcing the overarching mythology. Despite the careful handling of such instances by professional baseball or the sports media, questions can

still arise regarding the effects these counter-myths have on grassroots baseball and how contrasting myths are assimilated by Americans of various ethnicities.

### Chapter Three

### Chasing Records - Methodology

If, as Roland Barthes states, the mythic sign is perceived as neutral and natural, then it would seem as though its study would bring about some immediate confusion. According to Barthes, the manifestations of myth are pervasive as cultural phenomena, but, through mythological processes, are distorted and naturalized. Thus, Barthes' notion of myth raises questions as to its very ontology: how does one study the processes associated with myth when they are perceived as natural and embedded within everyday culture?

In *Mythologies*, Barthes identifies the *mythologist* as one who aims to undo the myth's signification in an act of semiological deciphering (Barthes, 128). But what does this act of deciphering entail? Myth as a concept provides a theoretical basis for this process, but requires a complementary methodology for the deciphering described by Barthes to take place. To assess the representations of baseball myth in the media portrayals of Barry Bonds in 2007, it is necessary to undertake a rigorous and systematic examination of specific manifestations of the mythology, while recognizing the multifaceted nature of myth. Such is the role of the *myth reader* as outlined by Barthes. The *myth reader* recognizes the presence of a dynamic myth involving processes subject to



myriad readings and contexts. Studying an ever-changing and multi-faceted entity, therefore, should entail multiple methodological approaches (128).

An analysis of the presence of baseball's mythology in the coverage of the 2007 home run chase necessitates a similar logic involving multiple methodologies. A semiotic analysis allows for mythological components such as youth or a distant and rural American past to emerge within a body of texts. A qualitative content analysis of relevant documents can isolate the manifestations of these themes within a sample of data. A discourse analysis (including elements of critical linguistics and critical discourse analysis) can aid in evaluating whether media portrayals of Barry Bonds challenge or reinforce the dominance of White Anglo-Saxon Protestant values within the mythology. However, when considering the application and relevance of several different methodological approaches, the possibility of employing a mixed methods paradigm often comes into question.

Mixed methods research is often positioned within the context of combining quantitative and qualitative applications. Drawing on an historical tradition which often favoured empirical data analysis, it is common for qualitative methods to be seen as clarifying or enhancing the understanding of previously existing quantitative data (Lewis & Ritchie, 37-38). Such a notion implies the desire to crosscheck one's results to achieve a more accurate representation of reality and enhance the confidence of the study's findings. This process is most commonly referred to as triangulation (Spicer, 294).<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Triangulation is understood as a validation process with an aim to ensure that any variance in the underlying phenomenon is manifest in the data and not a product of methodological discrepancies (Johnson et al, 113). It rests upon the assumption that if different research methods produce similar results, then accurate measures of the phenomenon have been used. Correspondingly, divergent results are seen as being produced by flaws or inconsistencies in the methodology, rather than by contradictions within the data. Thus, methods with distinct biases are used with the belief that each bias will offset resulting in an accurate depiction of the sample phenomenon (Moran-Ellis et al, 47).

However, an inherent desire to enhance the accuracy or validity of a study rests on the assumption that a single, fixed and coherent reality can be converged upon by using multiple methodologies (297). Instead, as Flick proposes, triangulation should not be viewed as a means of producing superior validity, but rather as an apparatus to foster a greater depth of understanding regarding a social phenomenon (Flick, 179).

Such is the thrust of multiple methods research: it is informed by the postmodernist idea that a researcher should seek a broad range of perspectives when examining the social world (Spicer, 298). Both mixed methods and multiple methods imply collaborating results of more than one methodological process. However, for the purposes of this study, the multiple approaches were incorporated within one process: a qualitative content analysis informed by the principles of semiotics, discourse analysis and critical linguistics. Despite taking into account the tenets and procedures of multiple methodologies, the overall research strategy entails a single comprehensive coding process. This process combined elements of each of the above methodologies in order to produce a media discourse analysis representative of the portrayals of Barry Bonds without coding the data several times. As part of the overarching content analysis, each approach was addressed in terms of Barthes' *Mythologies* and the key concepts of baseball mythology as outlined in chapter two.

### *Semiotic Analysis*

According to Barthes, myth is a semiological system (Barthes, 111) and therefore, when examining the manifestations of myth, there exists an inherent requirement to employ semiotic or semiological processes. Abiding by Saussurian concepts of signifier

and signified,<sup>4</sup> Barthes viewed cultural meaning as being constructed according to the rules of language (Williams, 157). Thus, the meaning of a sign arises from the relationship of signifier and signified, not from the relationship between a sign and its referent (Ali, 275).<sup>5</sup> As discussed in chapter two, the processes outlined by Barthes can be likened to the semiotic distinction between denotation and connotation. In the denotative instance, the author of a text possesses an overt interest in disseminating a specific message to a specific audience, and must allow for contextual cues to aid in producing meaning. In regards to connotation, however, these contextual cues evoke learned cultural associations that in Barthesian terms exist on the level of myth (van Leeuwen, 95-97). A semiotic analysis enables the identification of these relationships and contexts within cultural texts and is paramount to an application of Barthesian myth.

Although sometimes applied to the realm of the visual, as Barthes demonstrates, semiotic analysis can also aid in examining language at the levels of meaning and discourse<sup>6</sup> (Kress et al, 276). When performing such an analysis, however, it is necessary to recognize the dual nature of the meaning making process. The production of meaning exists not only on the part of the author, but also on the part of the reader. The reader undergoes an internal process of interpretation where the text acts as the primary informational and contextual resource for meaning making. However, the reader also

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<sup>4</sup> In the *Cours de Linguistique*, Ferdinand de Saussure termed the 'sign' as a perceived item (an audible sound, readable letters etc.), which he called the 'signifier.' This signifier is used to represent a concept, which he called the 'signified.' He called the relation between the two 'signification' (Danesi & Perron, 72).

<sup>5</sup> What is being referred to (an object, being, idea etc.) (Danesi & Perron, 364).

<sup>6</sup> Discourse can refer to a single utterance or speech act (i.e. a private conversation), but can also make reference to the systematic organizations of language involving the inscription of rules and conventions for speaking and understanding. This approach to discourse is most often associated with the work of Michel Foucault and his claim that discourse does not merely concern everyday speech acts, but dictates the way language produces knowledge and organizes social practice (Tonkiss, 374).

supplies his or her own information and context based on past experience and current environment (269).

Thus, one of the apparent shortcomings of a semiotic analysis of a text (visual or linguistic) is the tendency for researchers to ignore the complexities of the decoding process; in effect, ignoring the potential for polysemy<sup>7</sup> and homogenizing the reader (Williams, 157; Thumim, 153). The decoding process undertaken by the audience, in addition to the existence of cultural connotations, necessitates a reconciliation of the 'preferred' reading and the potential for several 'individual' readings (Ali, 274). When making conclusions based on semiotic analyses, it is imperative for a researcher to recognize the limitations of the method and temper the nature of any concluding statements accordingly (Alasuutari, 66).

But can a semiotic analysis be employed as a systematic methodology? Slater states that "semiotics is all theory and very little method" and, in doing so, illuminates another area of concern in regards to semiotic analyses: although providing a strong theoretical framework, it offers few practical guidelines for its application (Slater, 238).

### *Critical Linguistics*

As Barthes explains, myth takes on various sociological and ideological functions involving the support and validation of a dominant social order (Danesi and Perron, 259). Similar to myth, a critical linguistics approach also relies upon Saussure's notion of the arbitrary sign and incorporates the belief that syntactic or lexical choices have ideological implications. When examining the ways in which myth is manifested within newspaper

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<sup>7</sup> For a more detailed account of polysemy in semiotic analysis see McQuail (1987) and Golding and Murdock (1978). Barthes, of course, would be excluded from this criticism (see *S/Z*).

coverage, it is necessary to comprehend the notion that editorial choices articulate and enact social power in practice (Tuchman, 105). These articulations occur within the specific linguistic and grammatical choices made by the author of a text (Fairclough 1995b, 27).

The goal of critical linguistics is to expose the nature of these journalistic choices as being in the best interests of the elite, and to reveal how structural features of the medium are impregnated with social and cultural value (Tuchman, 105; Fowler, 25). Critical linguistics works upon the premise that all forms of meaning require position-taking and therefore construct phenomena rather than simply present them (Macdonald, 11). Since meanings are necessarily realized in forms, differences in meaning entail differences in form (Fairclough 1995b, 57). This differentiation process is additionally one of discursive struggle. By choosing to represent something in a certain way, an author is simultaneously refusing to represent it in several other ways (27). Therefore, it is not only necessary to evaluate the actual power relations emanating from within a text, but the failed attempts to assert power through discourse as well (Mills 1997, 135).

### *Critical Discourse Analysis*

Rooted in critical linguistics, critical discourse analysis (CDA) has sought to combine a linguistic, analytical approach to individual discourses with a theoretical conception of a single, dominant discourse (Tuchman, 106). Similar to the claims of critical linguists, critical discourse analysts perceive language as not simply reflecting reality, but constructing it. CDA assumes a production of meaning facilitated by language and seeks to identify how social categories and understandings are shaped by discourse

(Tonkiss, 373). The language of discourse acts as a cultural vehicle through which individuals are constructed as social subjects within a larger societal configuration (Mills 1997, 118).

Thus, it is useful to view discourse as it is defined by Myra Macdonald, as “a system of communication practices that are integrally related to wider social practices and that help to construct specific frameworks of thinking” (Macdonald, 10). Critical discourse analysis involves aspects of power relations that work as additional to, as well as in conjunction with, the construction of the ‘frameworks of thinking’ mentioned by Macdonald. When practicing CDA, it is necessary to view discourse as a site of struggle and activity. While structuring the way we perceive reality, discourse also constrains our perceptions (Tonkiss, 373; Mills 2003, 55).

Finally, discourse exists as a group of statements that are informed by institutions of power and possess a marked ideological function at a fundamental level (Mills 2003, 65). It is in this way that CDA aims to elucidate the naturalization process inherent to myth by making clear the resulting social determinations, which are characteristically undetectable within the cultural landscape (Fairclough 1995a, 28). CDA and critical linguistics ultimately work to illuminate the cultural processes that are generally taken for granted in written texts, while also shedding light on the failed attempts to assert power through language.

However, because critical discourse analysis and critical linguistics aim to demystify the dominant voices within media documents, they are also subject to criticisms which render them susceptible to privileging the researcher’s viewpoint. Similar to semiotic analysis, CDA can be accused of disregarding the interpretive

practices of the audience and appealing to an imagined ideal reader. Accordingly, critical discourse analysis often has a tendency to present a monolithic view of ideology, where analysts do not adequately recognize the amount of diversity within particular discourses (Fairclough 1995b, 28).

The importance of recognizing diversity within discourse is further emphasized when one considers how CDA and critical linguistics often yield findings that can be determined in advance based on preconceived ideological formations. The coding categories employed and the corresponding social relations considered are defined *a priori* the study (Bucholtz, 168). Bucholtz proposes that a researcher must comprehend and acknowledge the flexibility of discourse and the potential for multiple readings of a text in order to reconcile the perceived flaw in CDA and its contemporaries (177). Similarly, Mills confirms that the researcher must approach a study of discourse with a commitment to self-reflexivity and self-criticism. One cannot exist outside of discourse and such an inevitability must be taken into account when attempting to generalize or present conclusions (Mills 2003, 141).

### *Qualitative Content Analysis*

Like CDA and critical linguistics, a qualitative content analysis should also be based on a reflexive research strategy – the researcher can refine and redefine core concepts as the research and analyses proceed.<sup>8</sup> The iterative nature of qualitative research (including content analysis) allows for the analysis to work as a continuous activity of assessing data and articulating key concepts, while providing the necessary

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<sup>8</sup> For a more detailed discussion of this process, please see Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007 or Tuchman, 2002.

flexibility for applying theoretical constructs (Tuchman, 236, 247). Although qualitative content analysis acts as a systematic means for interpreting texts through a systematic coding process (Hsieh & Shannon, 1281), it is imperative to recognize that content analysis is a method for analyzing texts and not a theory. It does not provide parameters as to what aspects of a text should be examined or how to interpret these dimensions (Hansen et al, 94). Therefore, qualitative content analysis most often operates on a theoretical basis, where coding categories are inscribed deductively, or in other words, from pre-existing theoretical concerns. Meanings can then be elicited from a text through systematic coding whereby sections of the text are marked based on their propensity to contribute to the emergence of the themes relevant to the overall research question (Seale, 313). This process also lends itself to the analysis of large bodies of media content and trends that may occur over long periods of time (Berg, 240; Hansen et al, 112).

However, the decisions intrinsic to the coding process evoke questions as to how a researcher distinguishes between various elements and categories. While coding, it is inevitable that inferential and interpretive decisions be made; as Tonkiss writes, “qualitative judgements underlie the coding process” (Tonkiss, 373). Thus, it can be argued that despite the systematic nature of qualitative content analysis, its reliance on inference and interpretation compromises the claims to impartiality that can be made in one’s conclusions. Although the loss of objectivity may be a consequence of the interpretive essence of coding, it should also be noted that these inferences are inevitable if any meaning is to be derived from a text in a qualitative study (Winston, 58; Hansen et al, 95).



Objectivity is not so much a concern in qualitative research, and, consequently, the researcher must adjust the types of claims made when discussing results and recognize the inferential decisions made by individual researchers throughout the coding process. The inevitability of inferences being made during coding reiterates the issues surrounding preferred versus individual readings that were discussed in the previous sections on semiotics and critical discourse analysis. If a researcher is forced to make inferences when coding a text, it thus follows that an individual reader makes similar decisions - the results of which may not correspond to those of the researcher. However, these concerns should not prove to be failures of the method as long as the researcher recognizes these inferences and ensures that any conclusions reflect the complexities of the coding process.

Qualitative content analysis allows a researcher to extract themes and structures that are determined through allusion to semiotics, CDA and critical linguistics, and are embedded within cultural texts. Such a process can be achieved through a single coding procedure. When considering the methodologies in terms of Barthesian myth, the three approaches exist as complementary: the qualitative content analysis providing a systematic means to uncover the semiological and ideological processes inherent to the creation of the mythic sign.

A discussion of content analysis often includes a debate regarding the effectiveness of this method as part of a qualitative study. Accordingly, it is quite frequently affirmed that content analysis is purely a quantitative method (Hansen et al, 1998; Berelson, 1952; Silverman, 1993). Such definitions tend to espouse methods which merely emphasize the frequency with which themes or symbols appear as part of text.

These assertions contend that content analysis is incapable of accounting for the ways in which these complex elements interact within a text to produce meaning (Hansen et al, 95). However, as Berg states, content analysis can be used effectively as a qualitative method (Berg, 224). Where ‘counts’ of textual elements provide a means to identify the duration or frequency of a phenomenon, qualitative analysis has the capacity to address the thematic patterns and trends which occur throughout the meaning making process (224-225).

In qualitative content analysis, data are considered as a totality, where patterns emerge as a symptom of an overall cultural structure (Alasuutari, 11). Furthermore, qualitative content analysis emphasizes the linguistic and social context in which thematic elements appear, where quantitative study often deals with isolated numeric counts of data (Tuchman, 236). It is this distinction between qualitative and quantitative that lends itself to the purposes of this study.

The goal of the analysis was to produce a media discourse of Barry Bonds for the 2007 home run chase in the context of baseball’s overarching mythology. With this aim in mind, the primary interest lies not in the amount or frequency in which baseball’s myth was supported, but rather the ways in which the myth was supported in the portrayals of Bonds. A qualitative content analysis (informed by the principles of semiotics, critical discourse analysis and critical linguistics) allows for the identification of key themes and patterns, while examining the contexts which allow for these patterns to emerge. The iterative nature of qualitative study also provides the necessary flexibility when encountering possible redefinitions of the myth in the wake of Bonds’ accomplishments.

The essences of qualitative and quantitative research, however, are not entirely distinct. Both the notions of quality and quantity are essential to the nature of all things – where quality describes elements of form, quantity indicates the sheer amount of something being dealt with (Dabbs, 32). As Smith (1975) suggests, some blend of quantitative and qualitative approaches should be used in a study of written documents. Therefore, although the primary focus of this study was to identify thematic patterns through qualitative analysis, quantitative elements (such as the amount of coverage or length of articles) were also considered.

### *Frames and Themes*

In a study of print media, a theoretical emphasis on the notion of ‘framing’ has aided in bridging the divide between quantitative and qualitative approaches. Research centring on ‘media frames’ has provided a way to study newspapers that is not solely reliant on the amount of coverage surrounding a particular phenomenon or the frequency of relevant terms and phrases (Tuchman, 150). Facts and accounts presented in news reports and other forms of print media possess no intrinsic meaning. They are endowed with significance by being placed in a ‘frame’: an organizing thread that gives the facts coherence (Gamson, 157). Framing suggests that an item of information is invested with meaning only after it has been placed in the context of other information. This allows the facts presented to take on significance, while simultaneously excluding a cacophony of other potential meanings (Tuchman, 149).

In sports journalism, the writer lacks the capacity to provide the same sense of ‘being there’ supplied by television and still photography. In the absence of a visual

dimension, the information is presented to the reader within a frame of linguistic meaning, which invests the factual material (i.e. accounts of games, news stories, profiles etc.) with added significance. The framing of a sports story facilitates a realm of seemingly infinite debate, speculation and analysis, as facts can be continuously re-framed and re-discussed in subsequent articles (Rowe, 108).

In more general terms, media framing is derived from the work of Irving Goffman (1974), who viewed frames as means to organize reality in order to manage and comprehend it (Gitlin, 6-7). For Goffman, frames act as interpretive schemata, which enable individuals to perceive, identify and label 'occurrences of information' (Altheide, 30). At the level of media, frames are used in a similar fashion to organize and codify the information 'occurring' within, for instance, a news item. The term 'framing,' however, has been continuously used to refer to distinctly different (albeit similar) approaches to media, and print media in particular (Scheufele, 103).

Gamson provides an appropriate definition of 'frame' when he describes it as a 'central organizing idea for making sense of relevant events and suggesting what is at issue' within a news story (Gamson, 157). Frames exist as the broad emphasis in a news report (Altheide, 30). For instance, an article about steroid use can be presented as relevant to issues of health, law or sports, with each issue existing as a separate (but potentially overlapping) frame (28). As part of news content, frames are largely unspoken and unacknowledged and enable the processing of large amounts of information quickly and routinely, while packaging it for comprehensive presentation to readers (Gitlin, 7). In addition to the frames utilized in an article, those excluded from a story also warrant

attention. It is significant to assess not only how a story was discussed, but also how it was not discussed (Gamson, 158; Gitlin, 7; Altheide, 3).

Within media frames, there exist more specific types of meaning that work to produce definitions of terms or lend interpretation to certain concepts. In this context, these meanings are referred to as 'themes.' Where frames provide the focus for discussing a particular event or person, themes act as recurring theses or judgements which are found across several related news reports (Altheide, 31). Returning to the example of a hypothetical article on steroids, a theme such as 'cheating' can be presented within a 'Sports Opinion' frame, whereas the theme of 'danger' can be found as part of a 'Health' frame. It should be noted, however, that although themes and frames are related, they are not coterminous; the same theme can be used as part of several different frames or it can be framed in different ways (31).

### **Selecting the Sample**

When employing a content analysis to investigate the existence of frames and themes within a written document, it is imperative to first come to a decision as to what level (for example, words, paragraphs, articles etc.) sampling will occur. After arriving at an appropriate level of sampling, it is then necessary to decide what and how many of these units will be included (Berg, 228). A keen awareness and understanding of the topic and its relationship to the overall research question will provide solutions to these types of issues, while in the end influencing the size and characteristics of the final sample.

Similarly, the ultimate goal of the research should also be considered when compiling an appropriate data sample. In qualitative research, it is seldom the main

priority to produce results that can be easily generalized<sup>9</sup> to an entire or alternative population (Altheide, 32). This type of research follows a logic which is based on theoretical grounds rather than statistical motivations. Therefore, the selection of suitable sample units, levels and categories should be addressed in terms of the relevance to the overall theoretical position and the associated research question being developed (Silverman, 105). As Mason intimates, the emphasis should be placed on the 'construction' of a sample, where cases are selected based on their pertinence to the elements or processes being examined (Mason, 93-94).

Such a procedure is called 'theoretical sampling.' The term, often treated as a synonym for 'purposive sampling,'<sup>10</sup> describes a process in which the selection of sample materials is based upon an emergent theoretical or conceptual understanding of a research topic (Silverman, 107; Altheide, 33-34). A theoretical sample can sometimes rely on what is referred to as a 'critical case.' Critical case sampling entails specifically selected cases that are seen to demonstrate or illustrate a phenomenon dramatically or straightforwardly (Ritchie et al, 80; Tuchman, 239). Furthermore, a researcher should resist any tendency to deliberately choose cases which are likely to support the overall theoretical position or argument. Conversely, it is worthwhile to seek out instances in which the theory is likely to be challenged or contradicted. Including such 'deviant cases'

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<sup>9</sup> It should be noted that qualitative studies can strive to achieve what is referred to as 'representational generalization': the question of whether the results of an analysis of one research sample can be held to be equally true of the sample's parent population (Lewis and Ritchie, 264). This category differs from more traditional forms of generalization, which entail the replicability of the study's results in several different research contexts (For a complete explanation of 'representational generalization,' please see Lewis and Ritchie, 2003).

<sup>10</sup> Purposive sampling involves the choosing of a particular case for its perceived ability to illustrate a relevant phenomenon. However, this phenomenon is not theoretically defined and therefore, purposive sampling requires critical thinking regarding the parameters of the sample and the rationale behind its selection (Silverman, 105).

as part of the sample provides a means to examine the strength of a theory by examining it in problematic or atypical contexts (Silverman, 107)

### *Selection of Newspapers*

The sample data were drawn from three purposively selected newspapers: *The New York Times*, *USA Today* and *The San Francisco Chronicle*. These newspapers are all dailies based in major American metropolitan areas and have circulations over 100 000. Besides being selected on the basis of their large readerships, the newspapers were also chosen based on their prominence within a specific geographic distribution (for instance, the *New York Times*' status as the newspaper of record in the United States) or audience group. Each paper offers particular attributes that contribute to the scope of the overall sample. Newspapers differ from others in terms of circulation, demographics and ideological stance. For example, the *New York Times* has an extensive national distribution, which allows for the content of the newspaper to reach readers far beyond the city in which the paper is published. *USA Today*, in contrast, also has a national distribution, but possesses a tabloid style format which caters to a different (and arguably more working class) audience than the *Times* (Tuchman, 83-84).

The *San Francisco Chronicle* is based on America's west coast and was selected in order to counterbalance the east coast origins of the other two newspapers in the sample. Furthermore, the *San Francisco Chronicle*, being published in the same city in which Bonds' team was based, was chosen as a critical or deviant case; if Bonds was to receive a positive portrayal from any publication, it would most likely be from the Giants' 'hometown paper.' Such measures were employed in an attempt to control for

factors such as origin of publication, audience characteristics and team allegiance or affiliation.

From these newspapers, opinion and profile articles were sampled. To be considered for this study, articles had to run longer than 300 words and were presumed relevant if significant amounts of description, biographical content or commentary were provided to allow the reader to evaluate or produce a judgement on Barry Bonds. For example, an article profiling the relationship between Bonds and fellow player Ken Griffey Jr. would be considered relevant, where an article about Ken Griffey Jr. that happens to mention that his next game was against Barry Bonds and the San Francisco Giants would be excluded.

°° Accordingly, newspaper articles such as game reports or results, box scores and graphics were also excluded. This type of content, characterized by high amounts of statistics and game information does not present sufficient opinion or profile material to allow for evidence of baseball's mythology to emerge. Furthermore, the frequency of these reports (written around a 162 game schedule) also contributed to their exclusion. Letters to the editor were excluded as well due to their lack of length and the study's overall focus on the coverage and portrayals of Bonds, rather than audience or fan reaction. Staff editorials, however, were included as part of the sample. Having met the necessary criteria, articles were considered regardless of the newspaper section in which they appeared.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> For complete counts for the number of articles sampled from each newspaper, please see Appendix B.



### *Time Frame*

The sample was drawn daily from the period of 1 July 2007 through 1 October 2007. Such a selection ensured that articles published outside the coverage of the actual record breaking were included.<sup>12</sup> Employing a sample which encompassed large portions of the season allowed for chronological trends surrounding the coverage of Bonds to emerge. These trends involved significant events occurring throughout the summer, such as the tying and surpassing of Aaron's record, Bonds' appearance at the All-Star Game in San Francisco and the Giants' refusal to renew Bonds' contract. Such a sample also allowed for 'season wrap-up' articles, which often attempt to provide closure and perspective, to be included. Articles were sampled on days on which the Giants played, as well as their 'off days.' Such a procedure ensured representation of each day of the week and different parts of the baseball schedule (for example, day vs. night games, home vs. away games, weekday vs. weekend series etc.) to account for variations in the amount of baseball coverage.

### **Coding**

Since the primary focus of the analysis is to examine the representations of Bonds contained within large amounts of newspaper coverage, several categories were arranged on a coding sheet to allow for systematic data recording and comparison. The key categories included: date, newspaper and page number, article title, by line, presence of a photo, the presence of Bonds as the article's principal subject, the overall perception of

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<sup>12</sup> As stated by Hansen et al, event-specific coverage may be clearly defined by the date or duration of an event. However, the role of media coverage often extends beyond the time frame of the event itself, thus necessitating an examination of coverage before and after the event to achieve a more representative sample (Hansen et al, 102).

A). The page number was noted to investigate whether coverage of Bonds permeated other sections of the newspaper other than Sports (such as News, Style, Business etc). In addition, the presence of a photo was deemed relevant as photos can be seen to attract attention to a particular story, as well as providing supplementary content that can alter a reader's perception of the article. Descriptions of photographic content were noted in the 'Other Comments' section. The by line indicates whether a piece was written by a newspaper staff writer or editor, or whether the article was obtained from a wire service such as the Associated Press. Furthermore, patterns regarding the potential for specific writers to continually present particular portrayals or biases can be gleaned from an examination of this category.<sup>13</sup>

The overall perception of Bonds was coded using categories of positive, negative, neutral or mixed. As outlined in Einsiedel's (1992) study of the framing of science and technology stories in the Canadian Press, an accurate general impression can be achieved by assessing variables such as the information emphasized in the article's lead and headline, the balance (or imbalance) of praise or criticism and the types of descriptions and comparisons included (Einsiedel, 93). Observations regarding lead and balance of commentary were made in the 'Other Comments' section, where lists of descriptive and comparative quotations were made under the key words and phrases category. Articles that failed to present a discernable judgement or point of view were coded as 'neutral.' In contrast, stories that included both positive and negative portrayals of Bonds were deemed to offer 'mixed' representations.

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<sup>13</sup> Journalistic frames can include the intent of the author, but can also be a result of unconscious motives (Scheufele, pg. 106).

The newspaper articles were also coded along several dimensions crucial to the study of journalism, as well as major themes associated with Barry Bonds and baseball mythology. Since large portions of the sample were labelled as ‘opinion’ pieces, it is then worthwhile to address who is providing the opinion within the article. The types of sources included the journalists themselves, fans, current and past players, as well as managers and team employees. Each source possesses its own context and exists in a hierarchy of authority and prestige, thus adding to or detracting from the credibility of their claims. These different ‘voices,’ or what Hansen et al (1998) classify as ‘primary definers’ can act as indicators of the varying degrees of legitimacy accorded to different sources by the media (Hansen et al, 108-110). Furthermore, as previously discussed in this chapter, articles will be coded based on the frames and themes that are presented in the representations of Bonds and his achievements.

Two issues that have been pervasive in common media discourses about Bonds are the notion of race and the use of steroids. Bonds himself has been rather outspoken concerning the relationship between his status as an African American male and his documented lack of public acceptance. There also exists high amount of scepticism and controversy regarding Bonds’ statistical achievements and his alleged use of performance enhancing substances. These issues will be outlined in further detail in chapter four, but were also deemed worthy of special consideration during the coding process. When addressed in terms of baseball mythology, these concepts were granted extra attention; for instance, Bonds being mentioned as excluded from baseball’s White Anglo-Saxon history or his suspected steroid use being shown as emblematic of laziness or fan deception.

Similarly, the articles were coded in terms of direct allusions to baseball's myth as outlined in chapter two. Descriptions of Bonds' attitude, demeanour and work ethic, as well as insinuations of youth, and America's rural past were noted as significant elements in the coding process. Direct commentary regarding Bonds' presence as a baseball star or sports hero was also considered, and treated as representative of the article's overall depiction. Coding dimensions were also considered as potential frames or themes, allowing for the possibility of some overlap among these constructions.

It was originally intended to undertake a similar coding process for a smaller sample of articles from Mark McGwire's 1998 season. However, due to time constraints and the desired scope for this study, the sample for McGwire was limited to a purposively selected set of articles from the *Times*, *Chronicle* and *USA Today*. These articles were taken from significant dates surrounding the breaking of Maris' record, and were chosen for the extent to which they represent or comment on McGwire's relation to baseball mythology. These articles proved to highlight significant events within McGwire's chase including home runs number 61, 62 and 70, as well as the fallout from McGwire's admission to his use of the nutritional supplement androstenedione. Similar to the systematic analysis of the portrayals of Bonds, elements seen to be representative of baseball mythology were given special consideration; however, these articles were examined only to provide a means of comparing the representations of Bonds and McGwire, and were not subject to the same rigorous process utilized in coding the stories from 2007.

*Preparation for Analysis*

Articles were located using specific Lexis-Nexis searches and employed identical parameters for each newspaper. Bonds' name, bracketed by a pair of inverted commas ("Barry Bonds"), was used as the search terms for each query. The procedure ensured that the player's full name was cited at least once within the articles returned by the search. Such measures acted to immediately narrow the search results by eliminating instances of the appearance of only one of the search terms (recognizing the commonness of the name "Barry," and the possible alternative meanings and functions of the word "bonds").

The time frame of the sample was also entered as search parameters, although other possible parameters (such as article length and presence of a photo) were left blank. After the necessary searches were completed, results were cross-referenced with the totals returned from similar searches in other databases (such as Academic OneFile) or the publication's own online archive (for instance, SFGate.com). Relevant articles from the Lexis-Nexis searches were saved to disk, sorted and then coded according to previously listed criteria and dimensions.

Once the sample articles were coded, the completed coding sheets were examined in order to uncover trends and patterns in the representations of Bonds within the selected media coverage. Potential trends were to be assessed in terms of the predetermined coding dimensions; however, patterns not accounted for amongst the original criteria were also considered. Trends were identified by the recurrence of certain types of language, opinions or perceptions existing across a particular writer's body of work, a specific newspaper or the sample as a whole. These repetitious elements, themes and

frames were then examined in terms of their propensity to reinforce or contradict baseball myth. The possibility for the representations of Bonds to facilitate a reinterpretation or redefinition of the overarching myths was also considered. The comparative examination of 2007 and 1998 was carried out to establish links or contrasts between the media discourse(s) for Bonds and McGwire in those years. The subsequent comparison (found in chapter five) was completed in an attempt to illuminate trends regarding the treatment of the two players over the course of their respective record breaking seasons, and the evidence of baseball mythology discovered in both cases.

This examination hinged upon identifying manifestations of baseball mythology within the coverage of Barry Bonds' breaking of Hank Aaron's home run record. The stated methodology, informed by elements of semiotics, critical linguistics and critical discourse analysis, allowed for the systematic analysis of a selection of newspaper articles in order to produce a media discourse for Bonds in 2007. Although encompassing elements of three separate and complex methodological approaches, the analysis was undertaken using a single qualitative content analysis. Such an approach places a greater emphasis on the ways in which baseball mythology is supported, as opposed to simply ascertaining the frequency with which mythological elements occur. The coding process also involved an assessment of how various journalistic components such as frames and themes also contributed to the depictions of Bonds throughout the season. Focusing on opinion and profile articles within a specified time frame, the method described in this section provided a means to establish Bonds' relationship to baseball's overarching mythology, as well as address the relevance of its individual components in accordance to the principles of Barthesian myth.

## Chapter Four (4A)

### Official Biography

Full Name: Barry Lamar Bonds

Born: 24 July 1964

Birthplace: Riverside, California

College: Arizona State (1983-1985)

Drafted: 3 July 1985 in the first round (6<sup>th</sup> pick) by the Pittsburgh Pirates

Major League Debut: 30 May 1986

#### Awards and Achievements:

- Played for the Pirates between 1986 and 1992 and with the San Francisco Giants from 1993 to 2007.
- All-time Major League Baseball (MLB) career home run leader (762).
- Seven Most Valuable Player Awards (1990, 1992, 1993, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004).
- 14 All-Star selections.
- Eight Gold Glove Awards for best defensive player at his position.
- All-time MLB single season home run leader (73).
- All-time MLB walk leader.
- Only player in MLB history with 500 home runs and 500 stolen bases.
- Played in 2002 World Series with Giants (.471 batting average, 4 HR, 6 RBI).

#### Biography:

- Son of the late Bobby Bonds, a former Giants player who played 14 seasons in the Major Leagues hitting 332 home runs and stealing 461 bases.
- Godson of Hall of Fame outfielder Willie Mays, who is fourth on the all-time home run list (660).
- Bonds would regularly attend games with his mother at Candlestick Park, where he could visit the Giants' clubhouse and play catch with the team's players.
- Bonds attended Serra High School in San Mateo California, where he starred in baseball, basketball and football.
- Has a wife (Liz), a son (Nikolai) and two daughters (Shikari and Aisha Lynn).
- Founded the Bonds Family Foundation to provide support for underprivileged youth in the Bay Area and has worked in the past to raise funds for the University of California San Francisco Children's Hospital.
- Although not officially retired from baseball, Bonds is currently not on a Major League team roster.

#### Sources:

Barry Bonds Biography:

[http://barrybonds.mlb.com/players/bonds\\_barry/about/bio.jsp](http://barrybonds.mlb.com/players/bonds_barry/about/bio.jsp)

Player Information: Biography and Statistics:

[http://sanfrancisco.giants.mlb.com/team/player\\_career.jsp?player\\_id=111188](http://sanfrancisco.giants.mlb.com/team/player_career.jsp?player_id=111188)

Barry Bonds Statistics – Baseball Reference.com:

<http://www.baseball-reference.com/b/bondsba01.shtml>

## Chapter Four (4B)

### Unofficial Biography: Representations of Barry Bonds

#### *Bonds 101: Intro to Barry*

As the son of a well-known San Francisco Giant and godson of one of the greatest baseball players of all time, Barry Bonds was well aware of the benefits and pressures of life as a professional athlete. Bobby Bonds recognized his son's natural athletic ability at an early age and expressed strong hopes that Barry would also become a professional baseball player. Despite taking interest in Barry's progress as a young baseball talent, Bobby's overbearing style and his celebrity status created tension between father and son (Fainaru-Wada & Williams 2006, pg. 26-27). During his years at Arizona State University, the younger Bonds would often discourage his father from attending games and practices out of fear that he would be intimidated or embarrassed by Bobby, who at that time was struggling with alcoholism (Pearlman, pg. 54-55).

While often shunning Bobby's coaching and advice, in several respects, Barry inherited his father's suspicion of the baseball media. Bobby's mistrust of reporters and broadcasters emerged from the staunch belief that a media industry controlled by whites would not be sensitive to the special challenges faced by black players, and would not look favourably upon their success. Although initially attempting to cultivate a rapport



with journalists during his early years in Pittsburgh, Barry often found himself misrepresented by the media and quickly developed an unhealthy relationship with reporters. Like his father, Bonds commonly cited race as the pre-eminent source of these difficulties (Bryant, 349, 353).<sup>14</sup>

Partly because of Bonds' own outspokenness, assessments of his success or popularity often involve discussions of race (Nightengale, 2006; Boyd, 2007). Fan polls conducted in the midst of the 2007 home run chase indicate that Bonds' popularity (or lack thereof) also reflects a racial divide, with African-Americans being far more likely to be Bonds supporters.<sup>15</sup> Bonds, the product of an upper-class upbringing in a predominantly white neighbourhood, has at times been criticized by other black players for speaking in terms of race when he has little concept of an 'authentic' African-American experience (Pearlman, 225).

Bonds has also had several public feuds with teammates, most notably Andy Van Slyke and Jeff Kent, in addition to engaging in verbal assaults on well-known sports figures such as Curt Schilling and Bob Costas (Pearlman, 230; Bryant, 351-352; Ostler, 2007, August 8). Bonds has a tortured relationship with fans outside San Francisco, and was regularly booed and taunted in opposing ballparks (Bryant, 342-343; Knapp, 2007, August 5; McKinley, 2007).

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<sup>14</sup> Bonds' contestation comes at a time when the number of African-American players in the Major Leagues is declining. Where African-Americans had made up over 25% of Major League players for most of the 1970s, opening day rosters since 1997 have been less than 15% African-American - reaching a low of 10% in 2003 (Ogden and Rose, 230; Gregorian, 2006). Studies on the role of baseball in African-American life attribute this decline to economic and social factors, but also to the tendency for African-American youth to identify with basketball or football stars, as opposed to baseball players (Ogden and Rose, 227; Comeaux and Harrison, 77).

<sup>15</sup> An ABC News/ESPN poll conducted in August of 2007 reported that 74 percent of black respondents stated they were rooting for Bonds to break Aaron's record. In contrast, only 28 percent of white participants responded in favour of Bonds' home run quest (Moynihan, 2007).

Although Bonds has a reputation for being arrogant and unpleasant, some former teammates and coaches also describe him as a thoughtful and caring person. Those close to Bonds have commented on his playfulness around children, compassion for those in need and generosity towards charitable organizations. However, these displays of kindness are contradicted and often outweighed by public tirades and demonstrations of hostility towards fans and fellow players (Bryant, 31, 76; Pearlman, 93, 101, 239; Knapp, 2007, August 1).

### *The Steroids Scandal*

Bonds has been the subject of allegations that he took Human Growth Hormone (HGH) and anabolic steroids<sup>16</sup> to change his physique and manufacture a transformation from a well-rounded, 'five-tool' player<sup>17</sup> to a home run hitting specialist. In a series of 2003 articles, *San Francisco Chronicle* writers Mark Fainaru-Wada and Lance Williams connected Bonds to the Bay Area Laboratory Cooperative (BALCO), a Burlingame, California pharmaceutical company. In October, 2003, federal authorities raided BALCO's offices, and uncovered substances which were found to be anabolic steroids, HGH and testosterone (Fainaru-Wada, 2003). The raids also revealed records and schedules which were believed to detail Bonds' purchase and use of these illegal substances (Williams, Rosenfield & Fainaru-Wada, 2003). In 2006, Williams and

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<sup>16</sup> Bonds is suspected to have used two anabolic steroids obtained from BALCO nicknamed 'The Cream' and 'The Clear.' 'The Cream' is a testosterone-based balm, where 'The Clear' is an orally ingested liquid formed out of the compound tetrahydrogestrinone (THG). When used in conjunction, 'The Cream' and 'The Clear' work to stimulate the growth of muscle tissue and are undetectable by standard steroid tests. (Fainaru-Wada & Williams 2006, 57, 168-172).

<sup>17</sup> A 'five-tool player' commonly refers to a player with all of the following characteristics: proficient in base stealing, a strong throwing arm, an ability to hit for power, skilful fielding and an ability to maintain a high batting average (Bonavita, 1999).

Fainaru-Wada turned these reports, as well as other circumstantial evidence, into *Game of Shadows*, a 350 page book documenting Bonds' alleged steroid use and dishonesty.

Where the production of home run hitters typically declines as a player reaches his mid-to-late 30s, Bonds experienced an unprecedented surge in his power numbers; never having hit more than 50 home runs in a season, Bonds, at the age of 37, hit a Major League record 73 homers in 2001 (Pearlman, 231). Concurrent with this increase in production was a drastic change in Bonds' physique. Bonds began his career as a lanky and quick player, who, in addition to being a productive hitter, was also a proficient base stealer. However, Bonds arrived at spring training in 1999 with a bulky and more muscular frame, crediting a new fitness regime as the source of the physiological change (Pearlman, 199). This marked increase in size has prompted a wave in scepticism from players and journalists, as well as anti-doping agencies, who remain unconvinced that Bonds could add such large amounts of muscle mass at an advanced age without the aid of performance enhancing drugs (Bryant, 188; Pearlman, 199, 230-231).

Barry Bonds has never tested positive for steroids. Similarly, in his testimony to a 2003 grand jury, Bonds maintained never knowingly taking steroids, and having no knowledge of many of the substances he was suspected of taking (Fainaru-Wada & Williams 2006, 194, 201-205). Despite such denials, the steroid allegations have led to intense public criticism and federal perjury charges.<sup>18</sup> The extent to which the allegations of steroid use are reflected in media representations of Bonds will be one of the topics explored within the examination of the newspaper coverage of the 2007 home run chase. This analysis begins with four case studies of significant events from the 2007 season,

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<sup>18</sup> On November 15<sup>th</sup>, 2007, Bonds was indicted on four counts of perjury and one count of obstruction of justice for allegedly lying to a federal grand jury when he denied using a selection of performance-enhancing substances distributed by BALCO (Williams, Nov 16, 2007).

following which important frames, themes and comparisons will be examined as part of the overall media portrayal of Bonds.

### Case Studies

#### *Case One: All-Star Game*

On July 10<sup>th</sup>, 2007, the San Francisco Giants hosted the 78<sup>th</sup> annual Major League Baseball All-Star Game at AT&T Park. Bonds received a late surge in fan voting in order to pass Chicago Cubs outfielder Alfonso Soriano and earn a spot in the game's starting lineup (Curry, 2007, July 2). Bonds played four innings in the game, going 0-2 with two fly outs, and did not participate in the Home Run Derby.

Across the coverage of the All-Star festivities included in the three newspapers in this study, certain elements were found to recur involving Bonds' participation and reception at the various events. All three papers made special mention of the ovation given to Bonds by the San Francisco fans, which, depending on the account, lasted between 20 and 40 seconds. The *USA Today* described the applause as 'thunderous' (Dodd, 2007, July 11), whereas Henry Schulman of the *San Francisco Chronicle* commented that the cheering "would have gone longer had No. 3 hitter Carlos Beltran not been introduced," (Schulman, 2007, July 11). Each paper also described the pre-game ceremony, in which Bonds walked his godfather Willie Mays out to centre-field for a special presentation. Stories about this event were all accompanied by quotations from Bonds regarding the emotional significance of the ceremony with Mays.

However, with the exception of the article by Schulman, and another in *USA Today* by Mike Dodd, portrayals of these touching moments were followed or preceded

by negative comments regarding Bonds' actions or personality. Discussions of steroids, flawed character, and ambivalence towards the event in general (including his lack of participation in the Home Run Derby), were placed alongside representation of Bonds' welcoming or playful nature, and interactions with fans and other players. This led to a predominance of portrayals of Bonds the person, which were identified as mixed – either because they juxtaposed positive characterizations of Bonds' career with negative or mixed portrayals of Bonds as a person, or because two sides of Bonds' personality were represented in the same story. Although Bonds was the primary focus of the game's marketing, pre-game festivities and television broadcast, because the newspaper coverage addressed his flaws and associated controversies, it certainly did not portray the event as a coronation of a 'hometown hero.'

#### *Case Two: Tying Aaron*

Bonds' record-tying achievements produced more detailed coverage in each newspaper, and therefore, it may be assumed that the increased coverage would generate greater interest in him, the home run record, and baseball in general. For instance, the *San Francisco Chronicle* and *New York Times* included three articles on Bonds the day after he tied Aaron at 755. On the same day, *USA Today* featured two articles which also met the sample requirements for this study. For each newspaper, these amounts exceeded the average daily coverage of the Bonds chase.

The articles in *USA Today* presented high praise for Bonds' physical ability and career, but also questioned his most recent achievements, citing his alleged steroid use as the major source of the scepticism. In the *New York Times*, Jack Curry (2007, August 5)

presented an extremely positive portrayal of Bonds, where his colleagues Lee Jenkins (2007, August 5) and Selena Roberts (2007) provided less than favourable depictions in their accounts of the record-tying events. *San Francisco Chronicle* writers John Shea (2007, August 5) and Henry Schulman (2007, August 5) presented positive characterizations of Bonds, portraying him as humble and respectful. In the same issue of the *Chronicle*, Gwen Knapp recognized many of Bonds' flaws, but ultimately came out in support of the Giants' left-fielder by noting his respect for Aaron and strong hold on the public consciousness (Knapp, 2007, August 5).

Despite the variety of characterizations exhibited across the sampled articles surrounding Bonds and his equalling of Aaron's record, several distinct trends emerged within these diverse portrayals. Several authors specifically mentioned the history of Clay Hensley, the San Diego Padres pitcher who surrendered home run number 755, as a prominent theme in their coverage. Hensley was suspended for 15 games while playing in the minor leagues for using performance enhancing drugs. Many of those who acknowledged Hensley prefaced or followed the information with the affirmation that Bonds has never been suspended for, or been found guilty of, using steroids or any other performance enhancing substance. This juxtaposition acted as a source of irony in these stories, as shown in the following examples:

- a. "Despite the steroid speculation that has hovered over Bonds, he has never failed a steroid test. But Hensley, who will forever be linked with Bonds and 755, did." (Curry, 2007, August 6)
- b. "But the few asterisk signs in Saturday's crowd were directed at Bonds, not Hensley." (Shea, 2007, August 5)

Where some depicted this irony as a fitting representation of the steroid era, others such as Curry and Shea used Hensley's background as a means to vindicate Bonds and hint that the criticisms levelled at him are largely undeserved.

Other significant trends in the coverage of home run number 755 made powerful allusions to Bonds' relationship to the mythology of baseball. Accounts of the record-tying home run from Nightengale, Curry, Knapp, Schulman and Shea emphasized how Bonds, in the midst of a terrible slump, took extra batting practice before the game against the Padres to work on the mechanics of his swing. These versions evoked the theme of hard work and, as in the following examples, credited the extra batting practice as leading to Bonds' on-field success:

- a. "Four and a half hours before the game, a muscular, solitary figure stood in the batting cage at a mostly empty stadium and worked on refining his swing. It was Bonds."

"Before Bonds hit his 754<sup>th</sup> home run, he had an extra indoor batting session."  
(Curry, 2007, August 5)

- b. "Barry Bonds rediscovered his stroke in extended rounds of batting practice early Saturday, and it showed when he hit his 755<sup>th</sup> home run in the second inning off Clay Hensley." (Shea, 2007, August 6)

As illustrated in the above examples, terms such as 'worked,' 'refining,' 'extra,' 'extended' and 'early' invoke images of dedication and hard work – crucial components of baseball myth.

Another recurring element in this series of accounts was the inclusion of Bonds' 17-year-old son Nikolai in the coverage of home run number 755. Writers often made comments regarding how, upon reaching home plate, Bonds was greeted by Nikolai and lifted his son in a joyful embrace:

- a. "...his son Nikolai, a Giants' bat boy, was waiting. Bonds hugged Nikolai and carried him for a few feet." (Curry, 2007, August 5)
- b. "Bonds was greeted by his 17-year-old son, Nikolai, who leaped into his arms. Nikolai stayed in his father's arms for several moments while Bonds kept repeating, 'I love you.'" (Nightengale, 2007, August 6)
- c. "His home run trot brought him face-to-face with his son, Nikolai, who waited at the plate with his fathers' bat in hand. Bonds threw his arms around the lanky teenager, then lifted him off the ground, carrying him for several seconds in a one-armed hug as powerful as the swing that set up their celebration." (Knapp, 2007, August 5)

The presence of Nikolai as part of the accounts of this home run performs a dual function: it injects the scene with an element of youth and places Bonds and his son as figures in a quintessential image of family values.<sup>19</sup> Curry specifically presented an additional image of youth when he imagines an 11-year-old Bonds dreaming of one day overtaking Hank Aaron as career home run leader.

Several writers, however, depicted Bonds in such a manner that positioned him as counter to baseball's mythology. As part of a scathing portrayal in the *New York Times*, Selena Roberts used terms such as 'impostor,' 'vainglorious,' 'deceptive' and 'fraud' to describe Bonds. Roberts contrasts this depiction with one of Aaron, who is seen as embodying characteristics, such as 'self-made' and 'modest,' that are reflective of the mythology (Roberts, 2007, August 5). Jon Saraceno drew a similar comparison between Bonds and Aaron, but also portrayed Bonds as further shattering the myth. Saraceno wrote, "What about your own, Barry? What will you tell Nikolai when he starts asking hard, informed questions?" (Saraceno, 2007, August 6), and not only implied disconnect

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<sup>19</sup> Several articles also described Bonds seeking out his wife, Liz, and daughter, Aisha, who were waiting for him in the seats directly behind home plate.



between Bonds and the youth of America,<sup>20</sup> but also questioned Bonds' ability to fulfill his parental role.

### *Case 3: Breaking the Record*

A similar series of polarized portrayals was observed in the coverage surrounding Bonds' record-setting home run. The counts of articles reporting on home run number 756 were also higher per day than during routine periods of coverage; however, again, this increase in coverage did not translate into a rise in positive portrayals.

The accounts of Bonds' record-setting feat contained a diverse array of positive, negative, and mixed depictions. This range proved to be consistent across all newspapers, as well as within the coverage for the individual newspapers included in the sample. This assortment of descriptions, however, only applies to the treatment of Bonds as a person; excluding one mixed portrayal and one neutral story, writers offered overwhelmingly positive depictions of Bonds' career achievements and his abilities as a player.

Regardless of the manner in which Bonds was portrayed, writers seemed inclined to reference his relationship with his godfather, former Giants star, Willie Mays. Some articles, as in the following examples, not only described the pair's relationship, but also made special mention of Mays' own baseball success:

- a. "Willie Mays, Bonds' godfather and a man who had 660 career home runs and was one of Aaron's contemporaries, joined Bonds on the field after Bonds connected." (Curry, 2007, August 8)
- b. "Mays, fourth on the list with 660 career home runs, said Bonds should be remembered as baseball's greatest home run hitter." (Nightengale, 2007, August 8a)

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<sup>20</sup> In a previous paragraph, Saraceno also describes Bonds as neglecting the 'young, impressionable minds' of the nation's children.

The inclusion of Mays' statistics and the allusion to his standing in baseball history can be viewed as providing his comments regarding Bonds (most often positive and favourable) with added context and legitimacy. It can also be seen as placing Bonds in a lineage of great home run hitters.

Bonds, in several accounts, was also shown to have received praise from his opponents, the Washington Nationals, including Mike Bacsik, the pitcher off whom Bonds hit number 756:

- a. "The Nationals team stayed on the field, cheering Bonds throughout the ceremony, while catcher Brian Schneider sat crouched in the same position, also clapping." (Nightengale, 2007, August 8b)
- b. "As the fans serenaded Bonds with cheers, the Washington Nationals players still on the field, including catcher Brian Schneider, on his knees at home plate, clapped as well." (Curry, 2007, August 8)
- c. "As the place broke up in laughter, Bacsik just kept smiling. 'It's something I can cherish forever,' he said. 'I don't mind at all having my name attached to it. This guy has done it 756 times. He's done it against Hall of Famers. Giving it up to a guy who might be the best of all time – that's nothing to be ashamed of.'" (Jenkins, B., 2007, August 8)

The reaction and comments from the opposing team work to illustrate a sense of respect and admiration from individuals who, besides having a profound understanding of baseball, can also be seen as possessing insider knowledge of Bonds, to which the average reader would not have access. These players, however, would not necessarily have any strong allegiance to Bonds as would a Giants player; therefore, an outward show of respect from rival players (as opposed to his teammates) could possibly give additional credence to Bonds and his achievements.

Following the pattern of descriptions of home run number 755, three articles referred to Bonds being greeted by Nikolai at home plate. Furthermore, the pre-eminent

mythological theme of youth appeared in two additional contexts with each evoking contrasting connotations:

- a. "Bobby Bonilla, one of Bonds' best friends, was watching the game at home in Connecticut and celebrated with his 13-year-old son, Brandon." (Nightengale, 2007, August 8c)
- b. "Parents need to be able to tell their children that what Bonds did was ethically and legally wrong, as well as medically dangerous. Right now, youth see that the best way to get ahead in sports is by taking steroids, HGH, and amphetamines, and other illegal drugs, and this is an unacceptable message." (Weiner & Berenato, 2007, August 8)

Where the image of Bonilla and his son celebrating Bonds' feat fulfills the mythological standing of a baseball hero, the statement from Weiner and Berenato contradicts the notion of the baseball player as an upstanding role model.

Only two articles specifically identified flaws in Bonds' character (Ostler, 2007, August 8; Vescey, 2007, August 8) as the reason behind his disreputable status. Several writers, however, emphasized that although Bonds was popular in San Francisco, he was widely disliked elsewhere. In these articles, authors most often attributed the public's contempt for Bonds to his alleged use of performance enhancing substances,<sup>21</sup> rather than citing any general or specific failings of Bonds' personality:

- a. "Bonds has been connected with investigations into steroids, turning what should have been a celebratory journey into one that has had some tortured moments." (Curry, 2007, August 8)
- b. "As milestones I've covered and experienced, this latest one leaves an empty feeling. It's tainted by allegations steroids played a role in the achievement." (Bodley, 2007, August 8)
- c. "Rejected by large portions of the baseball-loving public as a chemically enhanced fraud..." (Knapp, 2007, August 8)

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<sup>21</sup> Several writers also noted Bonds' possible perjury charge in connection with steroid investigations.

Bonds' involvement in steroids investigations, contrasted with positive representations of his career, leads to a polarized or mixed range of depictions, the recurrence of the 'two sides of the story' theme and a discursive inconsistency as to how Bonds was portrayed upon reaching 756. This incongruity of characterizations reflects how the state of Bonds' legacy is similarly contested. Not surprisingly, amidst the coverage of the record-setting home run, several writers specifically described how Bonds' rightful place in baseball history stands largely unresolved (Knapp, 2007, August 8; Ostler, 2007, August 8; Curry, 2007, August 8).

#### *Case 4: Bonds and the Giants Part Ways*

On September 21<sup>st</sup>, 2007, the Giants announced they were not renewing Bonds' contract, and had no intention of re-signing him in the off-season. This decision signalled the end of Bonds' 15 year stay in San Francisco, and, like the other events surrounding Bonds in 2007, was met with mixed reactions. Not surprisingly, the *San Francisco Chronicle* devoted the largest amount of coverage to this event featuring seven articles the day after the announcement. In the *Chronicle* coverage, a clear trend emerged which distinguished opinion or editorial pieces from articles, most often containing interviews or polls, meant to gauge fan or player reaction to the decision. Articles which expressed the point of view of *Chronicle* writers did not provide favourable portrayals of Bonds. In contrast, articles detailing fan and player response presented overwhelmingly positive portrayals. These pieces involved fans and teammates espousing Bonds' greatness, and former Giants players (including Hall of Fame players such as Willie McCovey and Gaylord Perry) expressing their distaste for the organization's decision.

## Preliminary Comparisons

### *Comparisons to Aaron*

When a player approaches a major sports record, comparisons will inevitably be made between the incumbent record holder and the player seeking to eclipse the established number. Over the course of Barry Bonds' record setting season, numerous writers took the opportunity to draw comparisons in which the achievements and future legacy of Bonds were evaluated next to those of Aaron, with some articles being exclusively framed around such juxtaposition.

An August 10<sup>th</sup> piece by Richard Sandomir in the *New York Times* presented a complimentary portrayal of Aaron as a person, where Bonds was depicted to be of inferior character. In the same way, Bonds' achievements – although similar in statistical number – are shown to be of less historical importance to those of Aaron. Sandomir's analysis accounted for a discrepancy in television ratings between Aaron's record-setting home run in 1974 and Bonds' recent games by citing the players' contrasting personalities. Where Aaron is described as 'classy,' 'admired' and 'modest,' Bonds' personality is seen to evoke 'disdain,' 'apathy' and 'suspicion' among TV viewers (Sandomir, 2007). In the *New York Times* two days later, Mike Tollin offered a glowing tribute to Aaron and his involvement in the black community. Although no direct comments were made regarding Bonds' character, it was implied that, as the headline states, where "Bonds chased a record, Aaron chased justice." Where Tollin emphasized that Aaron was involved in an intense civil rights movement, he implies that Bonds *only* chased a record and thus looks unsympathetic by comparison (Tollin, 2007).

Although not placed in direct comparison, Bonds and Aaron are also found juxtaposed through indirect or implied statements. These types of comparisons most often portrayed Bonds as somehow inferior to Aaron; however, three articles (Curry, 2007, July 16; Nightengale, 2007, September 24; Nightengale, 2007, August 2) positioned Bonds as equal to or similar to Aaron in some way. Perhaps most interestingly, four articles in the *San Francisco Chronicle* (Schulman, 2007, August 8; Schulman, 2007, August 5; Shea, 2007, August 6; Shea, 2007, August 5) published between August 5<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> (days surrounding Bonds' record-breaking home run) portrayed Bonds in a positive light through an implied comparison with Aaron. Bonds is depicted as being gracious, humble and reaching out to Aaron. Through the manner in which his absence at Bonds' on-field ceremony was presented<sup>22</sup> and the emphasis placed on his refusal to comment on the record being broken, Aaron is shown to disapprove of Bonds' feat and is depicted as defiant, bitter and resentful.

Within these comparisons, the player who is portrayed positively can be seen as embodying characteristics of the mythology as outlined in chapter two, where the other is placed counter to it. This assumption holds true for most of these assessments, except for a small selection (Jenkins, L., 2007, August 2; Knapp, 2007, August 5; Nightengale, 2007, September 24; Nightengale, 2007, August 2) where both men receive positive portrayals.

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<sup>22</sup> Aaron did record a congratulatory message for Bonds, which was displayed on the video screen at AT&T Park during the celebration.

### *Comparisons to Others*

Within the sampled coverage of the home run chase, Bonds was also placed in several similarly structured comparisons with past and present players, other athletes and celebrities, and public figures. As found in the comparisons with Hank Aaron, Bonds was most often depicted as inferior in some way as a result of these juxtapositions. Such a characterization was evident when Bonds was compared to players such as Cal Ripken, Alex Rodriguez and former Japanese Leagues star Sadaharu Oh. These players were implicitly shown to embody baseball's mythology<sup>23</sup> by exhibiting characteristics such as humility and dedication, where Bonds is portrayed to be lacking some or all of the qualities which these players are seen to possess.

Perhaps the most interesting juxtaposition involves Bonds and former San Diego Padre, Milton Bradley.<sup>24</sup> In his article in the *New York Times*, Lee Jenkins proposed that Bradley, a notorious dissident, was nevertheless more endearing to Padre fans:

- a. "By choosing Bradley over Bonds, the Padres unintentionally sent a powerful message. Bradley, despite past run-ins with fans, coaches, umpires and the police, could still be embraced. Bonds, a suspected user of steroids who has a prickly personality, could not." (Jenkins, L., 2007, August 5)

Thus, according to this account, Bonds is found to be problematic, even when evaluated alongside a player who blatantly contradicts the ideals of baseball myth.

However, Bonds was also the subject of favourable comparisons (most prominently in the *San Francisco Chronicle*) in which he was placed in a lineage with former Giants players such as Willie Mays and Willie McCovey:

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<sup>23</sup> In the case of Sadaharu Oh, he is seen as representing the Japanese baseball myth as outlined in chapter two, which although representing several similar qualities to that of American baseball myth, differs in its emphasis on team-oriented performance.

<sup>24</sup> It had been widely speculated that the Padres seriously considered signing Bonds before the 2007 season, but, based on fears stemming from Bonds' personality and lack of fan approval, decided against it (Jenkins, L., 2007, August 5). At the time of the article in question, Bradley had recently been acquired by the Padres in a trade with the Oakland A's. Bradley currently plays with the Texas Rangers.

- a. “Hall of Famer: Willie McCovey, who was Bonds before Bonds in terms of sheer power for a left-handed hitter...” (Shea, 2007, September 26)
- b. “What’s more, the Giants have gone on record saying that they plan to eventually erect a statue in Bonds’ honour, joining their bronze tributes to Hall of Famers Mays, McCovey and Juan Marichal.” (Shea, 2007, September 23)

Similarly, on three occasions, Bonds was likened to the legendary Babe Ruth in terms of their physical ability and celebrity. In the *San Francisco Chronicle*, Gwen Knapp describes Ruth and Bonds as captivating baseball superstars:

- a. “It is Bonds and Ruth who share a larger-than-life quality. Bonds and Aaron share a statistic.” (Knapp, 2007, August 5)

Knapp outlined many of Bonds’ supposed character flaws, but insisted that these flaws contribute to Bonds’ ability to enthrall the baseball public. Praise for this type of celebrity is tempered by further comparisons in other articles that equated Bonds with infamous public figures such as OJ Simpson and Fidel Castro (Brennan, 2007, September 20; Saraceno, 2007, August 3). Such comparisons suggest that cultural fascination does not necessarily translate into positive public opinion.

### **Frames and Themes**

With few exceptions, articles regarding Bonds’ home run chase were placed in a variety of ‘sports’ frames. As outlined in chapter three, a frame can be distinguished by its capacity to inform the reader as to what is ‘at stake’ in a particular article.

Correspondingly, the pervasiveness of sports frames indicates that the significance of Bonds’ chase was not seen as transcending the realm of sport. Although some articles were observed which placed the issues surrounding Bonds in a wider cultural (American, popular) or societal (law, medicine) context (Winn, 2007, August 1; Jenkins, L., 2007,



August 8; Nightengale, 2007, July 25; Nightengale, 2007, July 26; Schmidt, 2007, July 12; White, 2007, July 13), the vast majority of writings on Bonds centered upon his status as a sports figure.

The frames most commonly employed as part of the coverage of the Bonds home run chase were Sports Profile frame and the Sports Opinion Frame. The Sports Profile frame often involved biographical or anecdotal pieces that would document or provide an account of an event or person. This frame does not openly lend itself to statements that provide judgement or criticism from the author, and subsequently the reader is often dissuaded from looking for such opinions. However, the Sports Profile frame does allow for quotes from parties involved that can impart judgment, and can often provide indirect or implied statements which enable the writer to present his or her point of view. In contrast, the Sports Opinion frame allows for the author to make an explicit evaluation of a particular issue. Although the article can contain biographical elements, the piece as a whole focuses on the writer attempting to make an argument and persuade the reader to adopt the proposed stance.

A distinct trend emerged in the treatment of Bonds within Sports Opinion and Sports Profile frames. Sports Opinion articles tended to produce negative portrayals of Bonds. Only one of the articles coded as Sports Opinion provided a positive portrayal of Bonds as a person. Such a tendency indicates that when authors were given the opportunity to voice their opinions on Bonds, they were most likely to construct an unfavourable representation, rather than come to his defence. If positive portrayals were made, they would most often involve discussion of Bonds' career or athletic ability. In contrast, positive portrayals of Bonds (both his career and personality) were most

commonly observed with Sports Profile frames. Where depictions of Bonds' career and abilities were often expressed through direct statements from the writer, characterizations of Bonds as a person were most frequently produced through implied judgements or by the inclusion of positive quotations from others. However, it is significant to note that even within a Sports Profile frame, positive portrayals were found in lesser number than mixed or negative representations.

Other recurring frames included the Sports Analysis frame and the Sports Humour frame. The Sports Analysis frame was similar to the Sports Opinion frame in that the author often presented a point of view; however, the conclusion was typically not communicated as the writer's own feelings or opinion. Arguments found within the Sports Analysis frame were perceived to be founded upon statistics, the objective evaluation of player performance or chronological trends. The Sports Humour frame often involved statements which can be based on opinion or analysis, but are primarily included to produce sarcasm or comedic effect. A frame analysis yielded a number of trends from the sample data; however, an examination of the themes observed, such as the 'two sides of the story' and 'unrealized potential' themes, revealed more significant tendencies which can be seen as more specifically pertaining to Bonds and providing further insight into the coverage of the home run chase.

### *The 'Two Sides of the Story' Theme*

A significant trend encountered across all sampled newspapers was the 'two sides of the story' theme. This theme involved the presentation of an attribute or piece of information about Bonds, which at a later point in the article was refuted or counteracted

by another related fact or detail. This structure worked to introduce distinct and oftentimes contradictory aspects of Bonds' public image or character that led to a 'two-sided' portrayal.

The 'two-sides' theme was most commonly observed when two contrasting pieces of information were presented as separate instances within an article:

- a. "Barry Bonds swung, then immediately raised his arms in the air, realizing that he had become the most prolific home run hitter in major league history. Everyone in the ballpark instantly realized the importance of what they had witnessed as well."

"Bonds has been connected with investigations into steroids, turning what should have been a celebratory journey into one that has had some tortured moments."  
(Curry, 2007, August 8)

As demonstrated by the previous example, a recurring manifestation of this theme involved the direct or indirect juxtaposition of Bonds' abilities or achievements with the controversy surrounding performance enhancing substances (Curry, 2007, August 8; Curry, 2007, August 9; Schulman, 2007, September 22; Ratto, 2007; Fainaru-Wada & Williams, 2007; Knapp, 2007, August 8). A similar articulation of the 'two sides' theme was also expressed through comparing the value of Bonds' statistical production with the complexity of his personality and reputation (Jenkins, L., 2007, August 5; Ratto, 2007). Furthermore, several authors supplied contrasting elements of Bonds' personality, which illustrated the 'two sides' theme by portraying Bonds as embodying both positive and negative character attributes (Jenkins, L., 2007, August 8; Bodley, 2007, August 10; Knapp, 2007, August 1).

In addition to being presented as separate ideas within a larger article, the 'two-sides' theme was also manifest as a more immediate opposition within an individual

sentence or thought. In these instances, the ‘two-sides’ were introduced as complementary or related parts of a single issue as shown by the following examples:

- a. “...it’s time for a change after an unforgettable run of record-smashing home runs and colossal scandals.” (Shea, 2007, September 23)
- b. “‘He’s like the action hero and the villain at the same time,’ said Lou Piniella, the Cubs manager.” (Jenkins, L., 2007, August 8)

In each of the previous examples, the overarching issue (the ‘unforgettable run’ or the public’s perception of Bonds) was illustrated through the presentation of opposing sides (‘record-smashing home runs’ and ‘colossal scandals’; the action hero/villain dichotomy). Despite the prevalence of this manifestation, this theme was primarily observed as separate notions that, over the course of a single article, were discerned as ‘two sides’ of the predominant issue.

Most discussions of Bonds’ fan support also incorporated the ‘two sides of the story’ theme. As demonstrated by the following examples, writers commonly invoked this theme when describing the apparent disconnect between Bonds’ hero status in San Francisco, and his lack of approval elsewhere:

- a. “Here [in San Francisco], he was saluted on the scoreboard by Michael Jordan, Joe Montana and Muhammad Ali. On the road, he was confronted with inflatable syringes and foam asterisks.” (Jenkins, L., 2007, August 8)
- b. “Bonds loyalists, many of whom live in the Bay Area, will argue that he has never failed a steroid test.”

“But Bonds’ critics, who live everywhere, will note how his body and statistics inflated in his late 30s, an age when they are supposed to decline.” (Curry, 2007, August 9)

Several issues, such as the geographic divide in Bonds’ fan support, were frequently presented as dilemmas which oftentimes remained unresolved at the conclusion of the

article. These types of quandaries were most often presented with corresponding options presented in sequence:

- a. "But once Bonds bolts another home run, will that end up being troublesome or triumphant for baseball?" (Curry, 2007, August 6)
- b. "No more Barry Rules. No punching out the clock before the end of the game. No sauntering."  
  
"Also no home runs into the Cove and no more 73-homer seasons." (Ostler, 2007, September 27)

In these instances, the issues surrounding Bonds were depicted as a dilemma made up of positive and negative aspects, which were meant to be contemplated by the reader. That Ostler punctuated his dilemma with the phrase, "Rejoice or shed a tear, it's your call," reinforces how the quandaries introduced as part of a 'two sides' theme remain largely unresolved at the conclusion of each article.

The 'two sides of the story' theme often led to conflicting portrayals of Bonds. Correspondingly, the 'two sides' theme commonly coincided with 'mixed' ratings, as well as instances in which separate components of Bonds' persona received opposite ratings.<sup>25</sup> Consistent ratings for all components of a portrayal (career, person, and sport) were seldom found in conjunction with the 'two sides' theme.

### *The 'Barry as His Own Worst Enemy' Theme*

Jeff Pearlman, in *Love Me, Hate Me*, wrote in regards to Bonds' dealings with the sports media, "It was almost as if Bonds was trying to damage himself" (Pearlman, 306). Although not always concerning Bonds' relationships with the media, the notion of

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<sup>25</sup> Such an observation involved instances where the portrayals of Bonds' career and Bonds as a person were given opposing positive and negative ratings – for example, the depiction of Bonds' career is given a positive rating, where the portrayal of Bonds as a person was given a negative rating.

Bonds being complicit in his own demise was predominant in several articles from the sample (most of which were found in the *San Francisco Chronicle*). This notion was identified during the coding process as the ‘Barry as His Own Worst Enemy’ theme.

This theme involved the insinuation (either through direct statements or being implied by a series of statements) that Bonds’ own actions, rather than the actions of others or unfortunate circumstances, contributed to the variety of problems with which he was faced. For example, the treatment of Bonds’ reluctance to retire was seen to exemplify this theme:

- a. “If he keeps looking for a job in the off-season, with his salary expectations still in the stratosphere, he is setting himself up for one of the most demoralizing exits in the history of sports.” (Knapp, 2007, September 22)
- b. “It just seems that Barry Bonds is going to look back and wish he’d retired as a Giant – the proper way, in the spirit of adulation. The ceremony should happen here, before the final home game Wednesday night, and he’s apparently the last person to realize that.” (Jenkins, B., 2007, September 22)

Bonds ‘setting himself up’ and being ‘the last person to realize’ he should retire illustrates how his decision would lead to humiliation months later. This theme was not only prevalent in discussions of Bonds’ possible retirement, but was also identified in articles proclaiming Bonds’ ignorance to the negative way in which the public perceived him (Shea, 2007, September 30; Williams & Fainaru-Wada, 2007, August 8; Knapp, 2007, August 1).

Conversely, several articles depicted Bonds as a victim of particular entities such as the media and Giants’ management. These portrayals, also found most prominently in the *Chronicle*, characterized Bonds as having hostility and negative publicity thrust upon him and contrast the notion of Bonds being his ‘own worst enemy.’ Bonds was often depicted as a victim of Giants management when the team announced they would not be

renewing Bonds' contract. Most portrayals of 'Bonds as victim' were articles concerning this announcement.

At various points in the season, however, Bonds was also represented as being hounded by the media and being subject to undeserved scrutiny. This type of portrayal often combined quotations from Bonds ("You know, everything that has to do with me is negative..." [Ostler, 2007, August 8]) with accounts of the amount of media coverage surrounding Bonds and the negative tone of the reportage. As described in the previous case studies, many of these instances were observed in coverage of the record-tying and record-breaking home runs.

### *The 'Unrealized Potential' Theme*

In addition to being depicted as his 'own worst enemy,' Bonds was also shown as not fulfilling the most satisfactory possible outcomes of his home run chase. These instances were identified in all three newspapers and were coded as part of the 'Unrealized Potential' theme. This theme was characterized by phrases such as 'should be,' 'could have' or 'instead of' and expressed how widely held expectations of Bonds, or the chase in general, had been left unrealized. The 'unrealized potential' theme most often originated from comments or insinuations made by the author of an article; however, in three instances, the theme emerged through quotations from individuals associated with the story's main issue (Bonds, Detroit Tigers designated hitter Gary Sheffield, and Bonds' attorney Michael Rains).

The theme was most commonly identified as an observation regarding the lack of positive attention the home run chase was receiving:

- a. “This should have been one of those stories of perseverance and comeback that baseball fans love to retell on drowsy August days like Alex Rodriguez recovering from a frustrating 2006 season to become the youngest player ever to hit 500 career home runs.”

“But Bonds did not just break Aaron’s record, he defied the law of baseball gravity, and for that there will be always be [sic] a question about his achievement.” (Barry Bonds at 756\*, 2007)

- b. They [Selig and Bonds] could be celebrating Bonds’ final approach to Hank Aaron’s hallowed career record of 755 HRs. Instead, they have not spoken, maintaining an icy silence.” (Nightengale, 2007, July 27)

As the previous examples illustrate, the notion of ‘unrealized potential’ was most often manifested as an expected or ideal outcome, immediately followed by the less desirable outcome which was seen to be occurring.<sup>26</sup> The sentences describing the undesirable aspects of the theme would point to the specific reasons for the unfulfilled expectations, which would often be elaborated upon later in the article. Furthermore, this theme often emerged in an article’s opening paragraphs.

### *Representations of Bonds’ Character*

References to the nature of Bonds’ character within the sample articles were dominated by terms and imagery that were seen to contribute to negative portrayals of the Giants left fielder. These depictions often described Bonds as arrogant, self-centred and rude, while questioning his work ethic and lack of consideration for others. On several occasions, the portrayals of these and other undesirable traits were manifest through descriptions of Bonds’ behaviour, by referencing his comments through direct quotations, and through comparisons between Bonds and other personable individuals. In these instances, an assessment of Bonds’ character or personality was implied based on the

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<sup>26</sup> These elements could, however, be included in reverse order, with the undesirable outcome coming before the expected scenario.



content or context of the description, comparison or quote. These indirect evaluations were not necessarily accompanied by a direct statement outlining the nature or severity of the particular judgement; such an inference was left to be made by the reader.

However, negative portrayals of Bonds' personality were also, albeit less frequently, represented through direct statements concerning aspects of Bonds' character:

- a. "Barry Bonds has worked for years to construct his reputation as the surly superstar, a man who cares so little about public opinion that he could barely face a television camera without sneering." (Zinser, 2007, August 12)
- b. This isn't about the media's often-icy relationship with a prickly prima-donna." (Saraceno, 2007, August 6)
- c. "We've all been so abused by Bonds over the years (I've believed since the mid-90s, he's the rudest, most ill-mannered person I've ever met in sports), we resent his sudden congeniality." (Jenkins, B., 2007, July 25)

As the previous examples illustrate, strong adjectives such as 'surly,' 'prickly' and 'rudest,' combined with verbs such as 'sneer' and 'abuse,' constructed a disagreeable representation of Bonds' personality. In several respects, these explicit statements carry more weight than implied assessments because the judgement is seen to more closely represent the author's opinion, rather than stemming from an inference made by the reader.

In contrast to the negative portrayals of Bonds' personality (which could be manifested by direct or indirect assessments), positive depictions of Bonds' character relied upon implicit judgements and deciphering on the part of the reader:

- a. "Bonds knew exactly who Willis was the first time he visited San Francisco in a major-league uniform. He introduced himself to the rookie, and he always makes a point of chatting with him when the Marlins come to town." (Knapp, 2007, July 29)

The previous anecdote describes Bonds as reaching out and attempting to befriend then Florida Marlins pitcher Dontrelle Willis. Without any direct statement being made by the author, readers must make an inference based on this particular representation; in this case, to envisage Bonds as outgoing and amicable. The readers will also, however, draw on their previous knowledge of Bonds while making this inference (for instance, taking into account Bonds' reputation of being self-absorbed or anti-social), and this may influence their overall perception.

Such is the crux of the depictions which represented Bonds as possessing contradictory personality traits. These portrayals include both positive and negative aspects of Bonds' personality, and were often characterized by terms and phrases such as 'complex,' 'Jekyll-and-Hyde' and 'contradictions.' Additionally, the presentation of dissimilar or contrasting anecdotes could also imply such a portrayal, with each story illustrating a different side of Bonds' character. However, coinciding with the overall predominance of negative portrayals, the positive aspects of Bonds' personality were, in several cases, represented as exceptions or seen as deviating from his typical demeanour.

### *Representations of Race*

As previously outlined in this chapter, Bonds, at times in his career, attributed much of his problematic relationship with the media to race. Furthermore, it is commonplace for biographical texts and commentaries on Bonds to involve examinations of the role race plays in the perceptions of his career and personality. As Todd Boyd wrote as the headline for his article on ESPN.com, "You can't discuss Bonds without

race,” (Boyd, 2007). However, within the articles sampled for this study, race was not identified as a key or recurring theme.

Only six articles out of the total data set explicitly discussed the notion of race in the context of Bonds and his home run chase. In two of these six articles, race was only mentioned through direct quotations from Bonds himself, in which he emphasized his African-American origins (Jenkins, L., 2007, July 13; Schulman, 2007, August 5). Only one article, a piece in the *San Francisco Chronicle* by Scott Ostler, identified race as a prominent factor in the veritable chasm between Bonds’ supporters and detractors (Ostler, 2007, August 8). Gwen Knapp (2007, July 17) and Murray Chass (2007, July 24) asserted that the positive sentiments associated with Hank Aaron can be used to refute any argument purporting that racist discourse influenced the public perception of Bonds. Such a claim was supported in the sample data for this study. The frequency with which Aaron, a well-known African-American figure, was shown to embody baseball myth (especially when compared to Bonds, see section: Comparisons to Aaron) suggests that factors other than race were at play in assessing the public’s opinion of Bonds, as well as how the media represented him.

The relative absence of discussions of race from the overall discourse, however, does not completely rule out its prevalence in the public’s assessment of Barry Bonds. Poll results, such as those reported by the *New York Times* on July 11<sup>th</sup> 2007, indicate that portions of the American population (especially African Americans) saw race as a predominant issue in regards to how Bonds is perceived. The mere presence of such a report also suggests that the sports media view the relationship of Bonds to his African-American background as newsworthy. The possibility remains that, although it was not

recognized as a crucial theme in this examination, race was excluded from the discourse only as a consequence of editorial decision making, which deemed it too sensitive and controversial an issue to include in the everyday coverage of the home run chase. It is also quite possible that unspoken constructions of race were active in the representations of Bonds, and that writers unconsciously employed preconceived notions of African American-ness in their portrayals of him. However, any explicit statements to this effect were absent from the sampled material.

### *Discussions of Steroids*

In contrast to the few allusions to race found in the sampled articles, Bonds' alleged use of steroids was mentioned in 80 articles from the data set. These instances emerged in an assortment of contexts and, as well as through the language used to describe these substances, were seen to represent varying degrees of speculation as to whether Bonds had used these performance enhancers.

At times, steroids were mentioned simply in passing or as an accessory to the more predominant themes of an article. In these contexts, discussions of steroids provided historical background on Bonds or were seen as contributing to a more complete portrayal of the significant issues surrounding the Giants left fielder. More commonly, however, performance-enhancing drugs were introduced as a major theme, and, instead of merely providing historical or biographical information, directly influenced the overall representation of Bonds. In these instances, steroids were often placed in the context of a debate or public uncertainty as to the possibility that Bonds had used these substances. Terms such as 'allegations' or 'suspicions' were regularly employed in these contexts.

This type of terminology recognizes the possibility of steroid use, but does not explicitly give credence to the accusations in any way:

- a. “There is no shortage, either, of allegations that he (Bonds) took steroids obtained from the notorious Bay Area Laboratory Co-Operative, known as BALCO.” (Barry Bonds at 756\*, 2007)
- b. “While others will dissect if Bonds record is true, or is tarnished by suspicions about his steroid use, Mays will not.” (Curry, 2007, August 7)
- c. “SCP Auctions has not lowered its expectations despite public doubts about the value of the balls, which were hit by a player who has been dogged by steroid accusations.” (Curiel, 2007, September 14)

In these cases, and in a majority of others, any interpretation as to the severity or legitimacy of these suspicions depended on additional content or the specific context of the article. These types of statements were also found to be prevalent in articles featuring the ‘two sides of the story’ theme.

In contrast to the uncertain or non-committal nature of articles which represented Bonds’ relationship with steroids in passing or as cause for debate, several stories argued Bonds was indeed a steroid user. These articles were classified into two distinct groups: those which viewed Bonds as representative of a wider cultural problem and those which condemned Bonds for his actions. Words such as ‘allegations’ or ‘suspicion’ were absent in both circumstances, and were replaced with terms more definitively asserting the negative implications of Bonds’ steroid use.

Several articles which suggested that Bonds did take steroids portrayed him as representing only one case among countless others, and proposed that Major League Baseball was to blame for the widespread use of these substances. In these pieces, Bonds is depicted as a product of the particular era of baseball, which existed in the late 1990s and early 2000s. In some instances, authors defended Bonds on the grounds that his

opponents (especially pitchers) were also likely taking these types of substances and, consequently, Bonds was not gaining a marked advantage over these other players. However, most articles which presented steroids as baseball's most alarming cultural flaw, also identified Bonds as its most notorious offender, and, therefore, provided an unflattering portrayal of him and his role in the sport.

Conversely, articles which treated Bonds' steroid use as an isolated and loathsome series of events made up the majority of negative portrayals. These articles were consistently framed as 'Sports Opinion' pieces, and ultimately condemned Bonds for his steroid related misdeeds. These claims were commonly linked to discussions of Bonds' possible indictment on perjury charges, and were often substantiated with evidence from well known texts such as *Game of Shadows*. Most notably, several articles of this type included arguments which associated steroid use with cheating:

- a. "Using steroids, as the evidence overwhelmingly says Bonds did, is cheating, and while cheaters may set records, that alone can't win respect." (Hall of trust, 2007)
- b. "The regrettable part of the story is that Barry Bonds did not have to cheat his way to greatness." (The house that Barry built, 2007)

However, portrayals in which Bonds was seen to be a steroid user or cheating were observed far less frequently than those which placed Bonds' alleged drug use as uncertain or grounds for debate.

Similar to the assertion that different terminology suggests varying levels of certainty regarding Bonds' steroid use, the terminology used in describing the substances themselves can also possess connotations, which influence the overall perception of Bonds. For example, 'steroids,' the term most commonly employed in regards to this issue, can be seen as carrying associations with less legitimate sports, such as

bodybuilding and professional wrestling (Swartz, 2004; Mannix, 2007; Wright et al, 2000). These associations are furthered by the use of colloquialisms such as ‘roids’ and ‘the juice.’ The other most frequently used term in this context was ‘performance-enhancing drugs.’ ‘Performance-enhancing’ emphasizes the employment of these substances to gain a physical advantage over others, and downplays other potential reasons for their use such as rehabilitating after an injury. In principle, artificial performance-enhancement also contradicts the hard work ethic that, according to baseball myth, is meant to be embodied by an ideal player. ‘Drugs,’ especially in conjunction with mention of Bonds’ perjury charges, can be seen as emphasizing the illegality of these particular substances.

Perhaps the most interesting aspect of the coverage involving steroids was the lack of medical or scientific terminology employed to describe these substances. Although some references to ‘The Cream’ and ‘The Clear’ were observed in the *San Francisco Chronicle*, these substances were seldom identified by their medical or chemical name. No references to tetrahydrogestrinone or THG were found in the sample data, and only one mention of Human Growth Hormone was observed. The absence of this type of terminology ultimately placed representations of Bonds’ steroid use outside the legal and legitimate discourses of medicine and science.

Discussions of steroids were also prevalent when writers described the relationship between Bonds and MLB commissioner Bud Selig. These reports often focussed on the ongoing controversy as to whether Selig would attend Bonds’ record-setting game. Many articles emphasized how the legacies of Bonds and Selig were inextricably linked through steroids, although this relationship was depicted in a variety

of ways. There was no consensus among the sampled articles as to who was at fault for the tortured relationship between these two prominent baseball figures. Some opinion pieces attacked Selig for his refusal to recognize Bonds or to simply make a decision on the matter, where others applauded him for his protest. Bonds was often commended for his unwillingness to criticize Selig, but was also rebuked for dragging Selig into the depths of a notorious scandal.

Ideally, a record of this magnitude would be undoubtedly celebrated by all those involved in baseball, including the commissioner. It is certain that such a trying relationship between two of the sports' most influential figures would detract from any sense of celebration that could accompany Bonds' feat. Similarly, the prevalence of steroids as a point of contention in the coverage of the 2007 home run chase prevented Bonds from fully embodying the mythology of baseball, and its emphasis on hard work, honesty and general acceptance among the American population.

#### *Other Significant Themes*

No discernible trends were identified for many elements which were thought, at the outset of the study, to hold significance. For example, the presence or absence of an accompanying photo (or photos) did not translate into a particular article type, frame, tone or viewpoint. Although, on occasion, photos could be perceived as providing additional comment to an article's content (for instance, an article about steroids being accompanied by images depicting a change in Bonds' size between the early stages of his career and present day), these were not observed in any notable frequency. No distinguishable slant or bias was detected for any of the three sampled newspapers. Such



an assessment includes the *San Francisco Chronicle*, which was selected as a critical case based on the assumption that it would provide more favourable coverage of Bonds.

Instead, the *Chronicle*, although offering greater amounts of coverage, did not apply any noticeable ‘hometown bias.’

The same can be stated for trends based on the tendencies of individual writers. A more appropriate distinction would be made according to particular frames (see section – Frames and Themes), rather than according to the predilections of individual writers. Authors who can be classified as ‘beat writers,’ such as Henry Schulman of the *San Francisco Chronicle*, Bob Nightengale of the *USA Today*, and Jack Curry of the *New York Times*, were often responsible for Sports Profile articles and, by extension, are not given the editorial licence that comes with opinion or editorial pieces. These beat writers did not typically include strong personal opinion as part of their articles.

Correspondingly, those who wrote Sports Opinion articles were more likely to express personal viewpoints and depict Bonds in a negative way. These same writers, when writing Sports Profile or Sports Analysis articles, would commonly soften the portrayals of Bonds and be less forthright with their opinions.

However, trends did emerge regarding the opinion of relevant figures other than sportswriters. For instance, current players (especially Giants teammates and close friends such as Ken Griffey Jr. and Torii Hunter) were shown through direct quotations to support Bonds. The same was found to be true for Giants manager Bruce Bochy, as well as former managers Dusty Baker and Roger Craig, and members of Giants ownership. This implies a contradiction in that writers would make statements identifying Bonds as one of the least liked players in Major League Baseball, but comments from the players

themselves would often defend and support him.<sup>27</sup> In contrast, retired players (excluding former Giants such as Mays and McCovey) would be shown to dislike Bonds and would often question his accomplishments. Although such a trend may not include Hank Aaron (see section – Comparisons to Aaron), baseball legends such as Frank Robinson and Dale Murphy were represented as disapproving of Bonds and his quest to overtake Aaron as home run leader.

Fans, when interviewed, also expressed mixed reaction to Bonds' pursuit of Aaron's record. However, it should be noted that these fan comments were often organized to illustrate a distinction between the opinion of fans in San Francisco and elsewhere.

### Summary

As the previous sections illustrate, the overall media discourse of Barry Bonds in 2007 involves several contradictory components. Where Bonds' chase was often described as 'historic,' it was also seen to be 'crummy,' 'tortured' and 'dismal.' A similar trend was observed in portrayals of Bonds - where positive elements of Bonds' performance or personality were often offset by negative ones. Bonds was frequently identified as 'polarizing,' which would point to the variety of opinions and perceptions existing in the discourse. These tendencies often culminated, as discussed in a previous section, in the appearance of the 'two sides of the story' theme.

However, most frequently, Bonds was shown to possess impressive skill and statistics, while offering very little as a person. Following the rating system outlined in

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<sup>27</sup> Such an assertion does exclude, however, the comments of Jeff Kent and Curt Schilling, who are known to have feuded with Bonds in the past.

chapter three, Bonds' career was often given a positive rating, where his portrayal as a person was seen to be negative. To paraphrase Scott Ostler of the *San Francisco Chronicle*, hitting 763 home runs comes easily for Bonds, but being nice to fans, other players and the media does not come naturally (Ostler, 2007, July 10). Such a statement embodies the overall tone of the portrayals encountered in the data set.

Even in split or mixed portrayals, which directly or indirectly contrasted Bonds' career achievements with his overall demeanour, the negative facets of Bonds' character often stood as the dominant and most striking elements of the representation. Bonds' undeniable athletic ability was almost treated as a given, whereas his personality, steroids scandal and public image (all of which were the source of much controversy) were accorded special emphasis. Such a trend resulted in several instances when Bonds was, in many ways, portrayed as the antithesis to the ideals of baseball mythology.

As discussed in the Comparisons to Others section, Bonds was often placed as being at odds with those, such as Cal Ripken or Ken Griffey Jr., who were characterized as embodying the values of the mythology. Bonds was depicted as neglecting the fans by skipping the home run derby (Jenkins, B., 2007, September 8), projecting an arrogant or self-serving persona and being a deserving villain (Jones, 2007; Ostler, 2007, July 10). Insinuations revealing Bonds to be a cheater (See section – Steroids), a bad teammate (Curry, 2007, July 15) or spoiled employee (Shea, 2007, September 23) reflect characteristics which contradict the virtuous and modest players envisioned by A.G. Spalding in baseball's formative years. At no time was Bonds portrayed as being associated or representative of American values, or even to be universally accepted by

Americans. As Jon Saraceno wrote regarding Bonds' recording-setting home run, "If America cheered, I feel sorry for all of us" (Saraceno, 2007, August 6).

However, despite the prevalence of occasions where Bonds was shown to be in conflict with baseball myth, there are also several instances (albeit fewer in number) where Bonds was seen as embodying it. Case two and three illustrate the introduction of Bonds as a father figure through descriptions of his interactions with his son, Nikolai. The presence of Nikolai as a key figure in the record-breaking scene worked alongside several anecdotes involving current Major League players to allude to the mythological theme of youth. These stories were relayed by those such as Jose Reyes, Kevin Frandsen and Dontrelle Willis and depicted the players as boys who, having once idolized Bonds, get the opportunity to play on the same field<sup>as</sup> their hero (Dodd, 2007, July 26; Dodd, 2007, July 10; Jenkins, L., 2007, July 29; Knapp, 2007, July 29).

Many of the stories involving childhood also worked to display more desirable facets of Bonds' personality. For example, Bonds was described as happily playing softball with his teammates children (Shea, 2007, July 27; Jenkins, L., July 27), and on a separate occasion, going out of his way to visit the sick child of a Milwaukee Brewers fan (Knapp, 2007, July 22). Bonds was often placed in a lineage with legendary players such as Babe Ruth and Ted Williams (Schulman, 2007, September 27; Zinser, 2007; Curry, 2007, August 9; Nightengale, 2007, August 8d), and shown to represent the hard work emblematic of the ideal player by taking extra rounds of batting practice and training in the off season (Curry, 2007, August 5; Shea, 2007, August 5; Knapp, 2007, August 5).

These examples and their propensity to portray Bonds as embodying baseball mythology add to the contradictions which pervade the overall media discourse of the

2007 home run chase. However, these portrayals also provide hints as to the contemporary strength of the myth in that it can even penetrate the target of such public apathy, uncertainty and disdain.

## **Chapter Five**

### **A Giant of Mythological Proportions**

The purpose of this analysis was to evaluate media representations of Barry Bonds, and assess how these portrayals relate to the overarching mythology of baseball. In chapter one, two hypotheses were introduced regarding the general implications of this thesis. First, it was postulated that media representations of Bonds could suggest public demand for greater accountability from those in positions of power. Secondly, it was proposed that the predominantly negative coverage surrounding Bonds could stand as testament to the contemporary strength of baseball mythology. These possible interpretations were explored through a qualitative content analysis of newspaper articles selected from the *New York Times*, *San Francisco Chronicle* and *USA Today*, sampled from the 2007 baseball season. The data served to illuminate the ways in which baseball's mythology was supported (and opposed) through depictions of Bonds and his perceived status as a baseball star. As illustrated by the dominant themes and examples derived from the data, Bonds was portrayed as a person embodying numerous contradictions. While most articles acknowledged positive aspects of Bonds' persona (most commonly, his talent and athletic achievements), they tended to emphasize the negative elements of Bonds'

character. Despite this primary emphasis, Bonds was also, at times, positioned as personifying baseball mythology.

Steroids were the most common point of contention, leading some authors to invoke positive memories of Bonds' abilities and achievements before his alleged steroid use began. This raises questions whether revelations regarding steroids, which emerged through *Game of Shadows* and the 2005 House Committee hearings,<sup>28</sup> were the deciding factors in shaping the predominantly negative portrayals of Bonds in 2007, as opposed to other considerations such as his personality.

Time and space permitting, it would be appropriate to extend this analysis through systematic examination, first, of newspaper coverage of similar seasons in which home run records were broken (most notably, by McGwire in 1998 and by Bonds in 2001) and, second, the longer term media representation of Bonds at various points in his career. Analyzing the coverage of past home run chases would show whether different players (in the case of McGwire) or different seasons (in the case of Bonds, 2001) would produce a strikingly different set of discourses than those revealed for Bonds in 2007. Furthermore, evaluating coverage of Bonds over a number of seasons (in a major publication such as *Sports Illustrated*, for example) would indicate if the tone of the

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<sup>28</sup> On 17 March, 2005, the House Committee on Government Reform, chaired by Rep. Thomas M. Davis of Virginia, continued its investigation into steroids in baseball by subpoenaing testimonies from several high profile baseball figures. Not surprisingly, members of baseball's leadership, such as commissioner Bud Selig and players' union president Donald Fehr, testified about the sport's drug testing policy. Several well-known baseball stars, such as Sammy Sosa, Rafael Palmeiro and Mark McGwire, spoke to the Committee regarding the role of steroids in baseball as a whole, as well as in their own careers. Where Sosa and Palmeiro denied having ever used steroids, McGwire provided ambiguous answers about his own involvement, saying, "I'm not here to talk about the past" and "I'm here to be positive about the subject." Many writers and members of the baseball community have alleged that McGwire's unwillingness to speak about his own drug history is equivalent to an implicit admission of steroid use. Barry Bonds, despite having previously testified to a BALCO grand jury, was not invited to appear. (Sheinin, 2005; McGwire mum on steroids in hearing; Curry, 2007, January 9)

discourses surrounding Bonds underwent significant change once steroids became a prominent and controversial issue.

However, the various constraints and the specific scope of this thesis did not allow for such a large-scale systematic analysis. Instead, it was possible to undertake only one of these comparative studies to provide some context for the coverage of Bonds' 2007 chase. What follows is an examination of a small sample of newspaper articles selected from the 1998 season in which Mark McGwire broke the single-season home record.<sup>29</sup> The principal criterion for choosing these articles was the extent to which the portrayals of McGwire reflected the central tenets of baseball mythology. Therefore, the sample was not intended to be systematic or representative of the media discourse on McGwire, but rather illustrative of the relationship between media representations of particular players and the more general mythology of baseball. This analysis, therefore, provides a basis for comparison between the representations of McGwire in 1998 and Bonds in 2007 in order to assess the ways in which journalists invoked the mythology for each player.

### **Mark McGwire in 1998**

The 1990s can be viewed as a period of turmoil for Major League Baseball. With team payrolls escalating, fan support was eroding due to widespread bitterness that stemmed from the strike-shortened season of 1994 (Paisner, 8). According to Bud Selig, as well as others associated with the league, it was Mark McGwire's pursuit of the all-time single-season home run record (then held by Roger Maris) in 1998 which worked to alleviate

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<sup>29</sup> The sample used for the 1998 study is described in chapter three; again it drew upon *The New York Times*, *The San Francisco Chronicle*, and *USA Today*.



the widespread apathy towards baseball that existed among the American population.<sup>30</sup> McGwire's accomplishment came at a time of unprecedented offensive output across the Major Leagues. This offensive barrage, linked to factors such as changes to the strike zone and widespread use of performance-enhancing substances, led to a marked increase in the number of home runs hit out of Major League ballparks (Rader & Winkle, 76; 90-91). Although the celebrations associated with Cal Ripken's consecutive games streak provided hope that fans would return to Major League ballparks,<sup>31</sup> it was McGwire's feat and a renewed emphasis on the home run, which signalled the beginning of a renaissance for professional baseball in the United States (Bryant, 115). Baseball revenues and attendance began to increase, but over time questions were raised regarding the role baseball, as an institution, played in this sudden spike in home run numbers. As Daniel Paisner writes, "McGwire saved baseball's ass when a whole lot more of its anatomy needed saving" (Paisner, 8).

#### *McGwire and the Mythology:*

As Mark McGwire, the first baseman for the St. Louis Cardinals, chased Maris' record, the overall tone of the newspaper coverage was strikingly different from that observed in the sampled articles from Bonds' 2007 season. As discovered in chapter four, the coverage of Bonds' chase presented a wide range of portrayals, from distinctly

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<sup>30</sup> The 1998 home run chase also involved Chicago Cubs right fielder Sammy Sosa, who finished with 66 home runs – four behind McGwire's 70. Sosa and McGwire were seen by the general public to be engaging in gentlemanly competition, and each expressed nothing but goodwill towards the other competitor. Sosa was represented as the more charismatic complement to the more stoic McGwire, and his Hispanic origins added a multi-cultural aspect to representations of the chase (Bryant, 132-133; Paisner, 8; Vecsey, 1998, September 8), which would be an intriguing avenue for future research, but is beyond the parameters of this thesis.

<sup>31</sup> On September 6, 1995, Ripken broke Lou Gehrig's career record of 2,130 consecutive games played (Bodley, 2007, August 8).

positive or negative depictions to those more nuanced stories representing Bonds as rife with contradictions or conflicts. In contrast, representations of McGwire in 1998 appear to be more consistent. The articles selected for this study continually focus on specific elements of McGwire's character or personal history, and construct a particular image of McGwire which recurs across the newspaper coverage. The representations are markedly more positive than those found in the sampled articles on Bonds, and place a greater emphasis on celebrating McGwire 'the man,' in addition to his athletic achievements. Furthermore, these portrayals show McGwire to be strongly representative of key components of baseball mythology as defined in chapter two.

Although he grew up in a suburb of Los Angeles, California, McGwire's size and demeanour were often depicted as typifying a character from the American rural heartland. For instance, C.W. Nevius of the *San Francisco Chronicle* writes of McGwire, "He is one of those guys who looks 'country strong' – big hands, big legs and big bones – like he grew up throwing hay bales" (Nevius, 1998, September 9). Despite his Southern California origins, the newspaper coverage of the 1998 home run chase worked to establish associations between McGwire and a Midwestern rural existence. In this sense, McGwire was seen as personifying the region of the United States in which he played, rather than where he was raised. Accordingly, in an article written the day after McGwire broke Maris' record, George Vecsey of the *New York Times* emphasized that McGwire played in St. Louis, which is in the middle of the "Heartland time zone" (Vecsey, 1998, September 9).

Another recurring element in the coverage of the '98 chase was McGwire's relationship with his 10-year-old son, Matthew:

- a. "...but McGwire is a devoted father to Matthew, 10, whose pictures line his locker and who has been a bat boy during the home run chase." (Curry, 1998)
- b. "He has openly discussed how he sought therapy, and has been a model father, as well as volunteering in the battle against child abuse." (Vescey, 1998, September 9)

Although a similar expression of fatherhood appeared in descriptions of the interactions between Bonds and his son Nikolai after the record-setting home runs, the previous examples involving McGwire emphasizes his status as an 'ideal' father. The inclusion of Matthew in portrayals of McGwire also worked to introduce the mythological themes of youth and childhood, themes which continuously emerged in descriptions of McGwire's family, and also in characterizations of McGwire's personality.

Articles incorporated flashbacks to McGwire's first Little League home run, that is, to his own childhood (Berkow, 1998; Curry, 1998), and more importantly, likened his demeanour to that of a child:

- a. "Big Mac is really just a great, big kid in a lot of endearing ways." (Jenkins, B., 1998, August 29)
- b. "He bolted from the batter's box like a wild-eyed kid, and almost forgot to touch first base" (Araton, 1998, September 10)
- c. "McGwire skipped to first base like a Little Leaguer, leaping and punching the air, so swept away he had to double back to touch the bag," (Ryan, 1998)

In addition to child-like enthusiasm, other facets of McGwire's personality were represented as positive attributes for a baseball star. These characteristics included his graciousness, selflessness and willingness to show his emotions. His consideration for others was often shown through descriptions of his charity work, and eagerness to accommodate the Maris family. McGwire, through his relationship with his son and playful interactions with Sammy Sosa, his rival for much of the home run chase, was also

portrayed as compassionate and light-hearted. These powerful representations emerged in spite of McGwire's reputation among players and journalists for being sullen, abrasive and anti-social (Bryant, 128-129). Although Bonds is known to be active in the San Francisco community and some authors hinted at the brighter sides of his personality, direct statements about Bonds' virtues were not frequently observed in the sampled articles.

According to baseball mythology, a baseball player who exemplifies many of the characteristics which McGwire was shown to embody should also be seen to possess a special relationship with Americans and American values. McGwire, at times, was portrayed as illustrating such a relationship:

- a. "For the man who brought Americans back to baseball, and, even if briefly, back together." (Hampson, 1998, September 10)
- b. "'It's like apple pie,' McGwire said. 'Every child, boy or girl, has picked up a ball, a bat or a glove. Everybody can relate to this sport. That's why I think all Americans can relate to this sport.'" (Curry, 1998)

#### *McGwire and 'Andro'*

On August 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1998, Harvey Araton published a report in the *New York Times* stating that Mark McGwire had been taking a 'testosterone-producing pill' that 'doctors say is the equivalent of a steroid' (Araton, 1998, August 23). According to Araton, McGwire's admitted use of androstenedione, a legal, 'over-the-counter' substance which had been previously banned by several major sporting organizations,<sup>32</sup> was "potentially myth-debunking news," which could cast doubt over McGwire's achievements.

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<sup>32</sup> At the time of this report, androstenedione had been banned by the National Football League, National Collegiate Athletics Association and the International Olympic Committee.

Although the story produced an initial fervour questioning the safety of androstenedione (Mihoces, 1998; While serious, dietary aids can't steal home-run thunder, 1998; Mark McGwire's pep pills, 1998; Jenkins, B., 1998, August 29) and the implications regarding McGwire's status as a role model, the coverage failed to escalate into full blown scandal. In fact, members of the baseball community and several sports writers came to McGwire's defence (Bryant, 141). When McGwire tied and broke Maris' record, only two weeks after Araton's initial story, the talk of 'andro' and steroids was replaced by celebratory headlines such as "Many joys of a home run lovefest" (Vecsey, 1998, September 8), "McGwire's real strength shines through" (Lieber, 1998) and "McGwire enters history with power and grace" (1998). In contrast to 2007, when journalistic suspicion and possible condemnation stemmed from Bonds' unproven steroid use, only passing mention was made of McGwire's admitted use of androstenedione in the coverage of his record-setting home runs.

This contrast is also illustrated by the language employed to outline the details of McGwire's 'performance-enhancement.' As discussed in the previous chapter, the substances Bonds was accused of using, such as tetrahydrogestrinone (THG), testosterone and human growth hormone (HGH) were most commonly identified as 'steroids' or 'performance-enhancing drugs.' This distinction placed the representations of Bonds outside the discourses of legitimate disciplines such as science and medicine.<sup>33</sup> Conversely, McGwire's use of androstenedione was often described in medical parlance. Terms such as 'supplement,' 'nutritional' and 'over-the-counter' were more prevalent in the coverage than mention of 'steroids' or 'performance-enhancing drugs' even though

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<sup>33</sup> It should be noted that in the initial reports detailing the BALCO raids from the *San Francisco Chronicle*, these substances were identified by their chemical names (Fainaru-Wada, 2003; Williams, Rosenfeld & Fainaru-Wada, 2003).

‘andro’ possesses the chemical structure, and acts akin to, an anabolic steroid (Mihoces, 1998). Emphasis was also placed on androstenedione’s status as a legal product, and its propensity to be found naturally in meat and some plants; some writers went as far as to compare ‘andro’ to foods such as steak or eggs. Furthermore, unlike the 2007 coverage of Bonds, the themes of cheating and deception were not invoked as part of the coverage of McGwire examined in the sample for this study.<sup>34</sup>

Paradoxically, part of the rationale used in support of McGwire in 1998 re-emerged in the infrequent defence offered to Bonds 10 years later:

- a. “Supplements do not teach the art of hitting a baseball, and for that reason cannot account for the fact that Mark McGwire has become the most consistent home run hitter since Ruth.” (McGwire does it! 1998)
- b. “Nobody – and certainly not some chemist in a white smock – swung the bat for Bonds against objects moving 80 or 90 or 100 miles an hour. He had to do that himself, with the superb reflexes he had as a cocky stripling, and craft he acquired as a smug and enlarged elder.” (Vescey, 2007)

In general, however, the contrasting traits exhibited by Bonds and McGwire, along with the different historical contexts, worked to construct divergent perceptions of the two players.

### **The Importance of Context**

These differences illuminate how the historical context can affect the coverage of a particular event. Both Bonds in 2007 and McGwire in 1998 were involved in controversies related to performance-enhancing substances, yet this issue was seen to carry much more weight for Bonds in 2007 than it did for McGwire nine years earlier.

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<sup>34</sup> McGwire did face criticism, however, for his failure to warn young athletes as to the dangers of ‘andro’ and related products.

Similarly, both players were seen to possess less than desirable personalities but, while these negative traits were emphasized in 2007 portrayals of Bonds, they were mostly overlooked in depictions of McGwire, in favour of more agreeable characteristics. It is then possible that the distinction may lie in overarching contextual factors, rather than specific differences in the individuals' personalities.

To reiterate, McGwire's chase came at a time when Major League Baseball was desperately trying to recover from losses (both of finances and image) incurred as a result of the 1994 player's strike. It can be speculated that the drama and excitement associated with the McGwire chase was identified by those involved (including baseball leadership, as well as sports journalists and editors) as a means to draw fans back to the sport and re-establish its status in American culture. Recognizing this opportunity, baseball journalists worked to ensure that the 1998 home run chase was an unquestionably captivating and memorable occurrence (Bryant, 115). Therefore, little negative attention was given to the undesirable aspects of McGwire's personality and his use of androstenedione. McGwire was portrayed in positive ways because the sport, in the words of Paisner, 'needed to be saved,' and connecting McGwire to predominant themes from baseball mythology was part of this process.

Although not on the scale of the celebration of McGwire's feat, the reaction to Barry Bonds' breaking of the single season home run record in 2001 also brings to light the importance of context in the portrayal of athletes and current events. At the time of his 73 home run season, Bonds had already undergone the physical transformation which fuels current scepticism, and was still known for his lack of tolerance for the media. However, the way Bonds was portrayed in 2001 was strikingly more positive than in

2007 (Pearlman, 238-239). In the *San Francisco Chronicle*, Bruce Jenkins complained that despite the large amounts of attention being given to Bonds, the magnitude of his achievements was still being underrepresented and “the cheering stopped much too soon” (Jenkins, B., 2001). Ann Killion of the *San Jose Mercury-News* wrote how Bonds had “found meaning through his ability to crush a baseball” and would be “watched through a veil of tears” (Killion, 2001), where Jason Witlock of the *Kansas City Star* described Bonds as a symbol of “American resilience to quickly restore order and get back to the business of being the best” (Witlock, 2001),

These more positive characterizations can be attributed to the timing of Bonds’ accomplishment; mere days after 11 September 2001. When baseball resumed its schedule after the tragedy, Bonds was shown waving a miniature American flag with tears in his eyes during the “Star Spangled Banner,” and pledged to donate \$10,000 to the United Way for every home run he hit until the end of the season.<sup>35</sup> These displays of patriotism, emotion and charity resonated with a nation in a collective state of mourning (Pearlman, 238-239). The positive portrayals of Bonds can be seen as reflecting this period in the history of the United States.

In 2007, by contrast, Bonds found himself under a unique set of circumstances. Where the contexts in 1998 and 2001 were conducive to the process of hero formation, the situation was drastically different in 2007. Bonds was seen as contributing to what Erik Brady of *USA Today* described as a ‘crisis of credibility’ in professional sports. In addition to Bonds’ pursuit of Aaron’s record, the summer of 2007 saw Atlanta Falcons’

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<sup>35</sup> Although Bonds was, for the most part, well received, many members of the baseball community viewed Bonds with much scepticism and saw his gestures to be insincere. According to Jeff Pearlman, the donations to the United Way were orchestrated by Bonds’ publicist. Similarly, some of Bonds’ teammates, as well as other MLB players, have spoken out questioning the sincerity of Bonds’ actions after 9/11 (Pearlman, 238-239).



quarterback Michael Vick charged in federal court for his involvement in a dog fighting ring, and National Basketball Association referee Tim Donaghy resign due to speculation he fixed games on behalf of organized crime (Brady, 2007). Already suffering from bad publicity stemming from *Game of Shadows* and steroid-related investigations, Bonds' chase was confronted with widespread scepticism that acted upon the public's perception of all sports. Where an already insolent and 'inflated' Bonds was seemingly given the benefit of the doubt in 2001, the confluence of events under which he performed in 2007 can be seen as contributing to the types of portrayals found in the coverage of Bonds as he approached the record.

The question then arises as to whether the issues being faced by professional sports in 2007 are symptomatic of a general shift in public expectations of the modern sports figure. If so, it would follow that the imagery and values associated with baseball's mythology would be largely irrelevant to the contemporary sports scene. Jere Longman of the *New York Times* wrote how increasing salaries, drugs and bad behaviour have eclipsed the values promoted by baseball's myth, and consequently, made the 'athlete-as-role model' obsolete (Longman, 2007). However, the data reported in chapter four indicate that the mythology still holds significance in the discourse of baseball and contemporary sports culture.

### **The Contemporary Strength of Baseball Mythology**

The recurrence of instances where Bonds was positioned as deviating from the mythology, or of inferior character compared to other baseball greats, suggests the existence of a value system to which representations of Bonds are opposed. Similarly,

there were numerous examples of coverage in which Bonds was soundly condemned for his various misdeeds or general disposition. In these instances, criticisms were not levelled through comparisons to other current or past players; rather, Bonds was seen as not measuring up to the 'ideal player.' The characteristics seen to be embodied by the ideal player, such as hard work, honesty and congeniality, were largely congruent with those prevalent in the mythology of baseball.

As outlined in chapter two, baseball's dominant mythology was originally constructed as exclusive to white Anglo-Saxons; players of other ethnicities and races existed outside its value system. Correspondingly, inferences can be made whereby Bonds' exclusion from the mythology is based upon such racial difference. However, the recurrence of comparisons in which Bonds was seen as inferior to other African-American players who *are* seen as representative of the mythology (most notably, Hank Aaron) refutes such a notion. It is possible that baseball's mythology has evolved to allow for a construct of an ideal player which can be coded as 'race-neutral,' or, at the very least, to include players of different races and ethnicities who are seen as incorporating several components of the ideal player.

Placing Bonds as deviating from this set of ideals points to the existence of a robust American baseball mythology, and suggests that the mythology is worth protecting and needs to be upheld. Since Bonds was portrayed in predominantly negative ways, it can then be assumed that the values associated with baseball and its mythology are believed to be inherently positive. Writers could have celebrated Bonds as having an 'in your face' attitude or focussed on his talent and athletic abilities; instead, journalists most commonly portrayed Bonds as aberrant, and deviating from what an ideal baseball player

(and American) should be. This indicates that baseball, as a construct, continues to transcend the realm of sport and act as an American social and cultural benchmark; the traits that make someone a better baseball player, *still* make him a better American.

Perhaps even more striking are the instances in which Bonds is shown to embody elements of the mythology. As discussed in chapter four, Bonds was depicted in several articles as displaying components of the baseball myth, such as youth, compassion and family values. Thus, it is testament to the strength of the myth if its ideals can be detected in a player who is otherwise perceived to be of undesirable character. To put it simply, if baseball can bring out the best in Barry Bonds, it can most certainly act upon the average American citizen. Furthermore, the mythology acts as a touchstone for the journalist constructing the portrayals; in most cases, journalists will choose the language, tone and imagery associated with a particular event or individual. The frequent use of the components of baseball mythology as a reference point in depictions of Bonds (either positive or negative) suggests a commitment across the profession to promoting and reinforcing the myth's ideals.<sup>36</sup>

However, as Rein and Shields (2007) argue, the era of 24-hour sports coverage (on television and online) has removed the traditional filter of the sportswriter. Where journalists, in the past, may not have been willing to write a negative story about Ruth or Cobb, they now face an audience with seemingly instantaneous access to sports information and images. The contemporary fan enjoys the ability to watch live events as they unfold and, in many ways, witness an athlete's behaviour first-hand. Transgressions,

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<sup>36</sup> This could be, in part, due to the overlap between the value systems of baseball and the United States. However, recognizing the importance of baseball's mythological elements to a fan's enjoyment, perhaps journalists may be consciously attempting to further the myth, thereby ensuring the sports' popularity (and their livelihoods).

which may have been overlooked or reframed by writers of the past, are now almost immediately documented on blogs and through internet video. In this new journalistic landscape, sportswriters have no choice but to play along (Rein & Shields, 64). It may, therefore, be more difficult than in the past to mythologize an unpleasant and obnoxious player, especially while he is still active, and the portrayals of Bonds may reflect this tension.

In spite of this, there is a possibility that the current perceptions of Bonds will not remain fixed and are subject to change. Since the mythology rests upon nostalgia and longing for a distant past, an opportunity will exist in future years for broadcasters and journalists to reframe Bonds' achievements, perhaps in terms of his statistics or talent, rather than personality or steroids. For Bonds, time may act as an important variable in rehabilitating his status in the baseball pantheon. If the distant past, as part of baseball mythology, is seen as inherently desirable, Bonds could be seen in a different light as a member of a past generation of players. However, given the prevalence of 'all-access' sports coverage, the circumstances in which he broke the record, and the recent political emphasis on eradicating performance-enhancing drugs from professional sports, such a process of rehabilitation may be far too difficult to undertake.

### Appendix A: Sample Coding Sheets

Case #	Date (mm/dd/yy)	Newspaper and Page #	Title	By Line	Photo (y/n)	Is Bonds the Principal Subject?
1						
2						
3						
4						

Case #	Overall Perception (+, -, o, x)	Frame(s)	Themes	Key Words and Phrases	Other Comments
1					
2					
3					
4					

**Appendix B: Sampled Articles from Each Newspaper**

	<i>New York Times</i>	<i>San Francisco Chronicle</i>	<i>USA Today</i>	<b>TOTAL</b>
<b>Number of Articles Sampled</b>	65	80	48	193

\*A total of 22 articles were selected from the three newspapers for the analysis of Mark McGwire in 1998.

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